

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809

March 13, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Maile S. L. Shimabukuro, Chair
House Committee on Human Service and Housing

Honorable Jerry L. Chang, Chari
House Committee on Higher Education

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: S.B. 2246, S.D. 2 - RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD
ALLOWANCE FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

Hearing: March 13, 2008 Thursday, 8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of S. B. 2246, S.D. 2, is to expand the opportunity for former foster youth to pursue and complete post-secondary education, by increasing the length of the time to apply for a higher education board allowance and extending the maximum benefit length from 48 months to 60 months.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department strongly supports this bill because expanding post-secondary opportunities for former foster youth will enhance the likelihood that former foster youth will obtain an appropriate post-secondary education and make successful transitions to self-sufficiency.

The Department is not requesting additional funding to implement this bill. We anticipate that the current budget will

be sufficient to cover the costs of the proposed higher education board allowances for the balance of this biennium.

As one of our former foster youth stated at a previous hearing on this bill, this legislation provides us with the opportunity to offer a "hand-up" not a "hand-out." Providing higher education board allowances to former foster youth represents a needed investment in our most precious resource - our youth, through which we have the opportunity to improve the future outcomes for our keiki and our communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important measure.



**SB 2246, SD2 RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD ALLOWANCE FOR
FORMER FOSTER YOUTH**

House Committees on Human Services & Housing and Higher
Education

March 13, 2008
329

8:30 a.m.

Room

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports SB 2246, SD2. Our interest in this legislation is primarily based on our concern that 52% of the children placed in foster care in Hawai'i are of Native Hawaiian ancestry, and when these children reach the age of majority they exit the foster care system without any kind of transitional support that can help them become productive and self-sufficient adults.

We strongly support this measure because many former foster youth are unprepared for the realities of making a living on their own after exiting foster home. These realities, such as finding housing, a means to earn income so you can pay for housing, food and other necessities, can sometimes compound the emotional and physical trauma they suffered prior to and as foster children; leading to feelings of helplessness, despair, and depression, and perhaps, deviant behavior.

If the higher education board allowances are made available, it will make their pursuit of post-secondary education, and the training and skills that it can provide, much easier and attainable.

The funding provided through this bill is a much needed resource that can help former foster youth not only survive but exceed and significantly improve the quality of their lives. We strongly urge its passage.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to present testimony.



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OF HAWAII, INC.

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TO: Representative Maile S. L. Shimabukuro, Chair
Representative Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair
Committee on Human Services & Housing

Representative Jerry L. Chang, Chair
Representative Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair
Committee on Higher Education

FROM: Alfred Herrera, President
The Children's Alliance of Hawaii, Inc.
(808) 599-2955 x 215

HEARING: 8:30 am, Thursday, March 13, 2008, Room 329

RE: Support of S.B. 2246 S.D.2 Relating to Higher Education Board
Allowance for Former Foster Youth.

The Children's Alliance of Hawaii is a non-profit organization, incorporated in 1987. We provide supportive services to sexually abused children on Oahu and Kauai in order to assist them in the healing process and offer hope for their future. Each year we serve over 700 children. Many of the children we serve are in foster care.

We strongly support S.B. 2246 S.D.2, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth. This measure will help former foster youth by granting additional time to create a stable living situation while remaining eligible for the higher education board allowance. Former foster youth who are given this extra time will be better prepared to meet the challenges of an independent adulthood, and will consequently have greater chances for success when they enter an institution of higher education.

Through our Ho`omaka Program we work with foster youth and prepare them for their transition to adulthood by assisting them to determine, define and develop a pathway for achieving their life goals. We see first hand how this measure will significantly increase the likeliness that our former foster youth will achieve their goals and become healthy and productive adults.

We respectfully request the committees to pass S.B. 2246 S.D.2.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

TO: **Committee on Human Services & Housing**
Representative Shimabukuro, Chair
Representative Rhoads, Vice Chair

Committee on Higher Education
Representative Chang, Chair
Representative Bertram, Vice Chair

FROM: Hawaii Foster Parent Association
Judith Wilhoite, Executive Director

RE: SB 2246, SD2 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance
for Former Foster Youth

DATE: Thursday, March 13, 2008

TIME: 8:30 a.m.

Dear Representatives Shimabukuro, Chang, Rhoads and Bertram,

The Hawaii Foster Parent Association (HFPA) is in strong support SB2246.

The statistics for youth who “age out” of foster care are dismal. Within 2 to 4 years of leaving the system, fewer than half are employed, 25% have been homeless, 65% of the young women have given birth, 30% do not have health care and fewer than one in five are self-supporting.

We believe that by improving the ability of our youth to achieve their educational goals and their full potential, our youth will enjoy better outcomes, thus promoting a healthier community for all.

Additionally, this bill addresses a perverse choice some of our children must face while in foster care. Currently, if a child becomes available for adoption as a teen and there is a family who wants to adopt this child, the child would lose the higher education board payment from DHS if the child is adopted. We believe that no child should have to choose between a forever family and higher education funding. This bill will allow foster children aged 16 and older to chose adoption and retain their higher education payments.

I would like to emphasize that this bill will NOT require funding for the Department of Human Services has the funds to implement the changes in this program in their budget.

Again, we believe that one of the greatest hopes for a happy, productive life for our foster youth is for them to attain higher degree of education. This bill goes a long way in helping assure more of our youth have that opportunity.

Thank you for this opportunity to support this very important bill,

Judith Wilhoite
Executive Director
Hawaii Foster Parent Association

A JOINT LEGISLATIVE EFFORT

E-Mail: HSHtestimony@Capitol.hawaii.gov

Regarding: House HSH/HED Hearing

Hearing on: March 13, 2008 @ 8:30 a.m. in room 329

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Date: March 10, 2008

To: House Committee on Human Services & Housing
Honorable Maile Shimabukuro, Chair
Honorable Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

House Committee on Higher Education
Honorable Jerry Chang, Chair
Honorable Joe Bertram, Vice Chair

From: Kelly M. Rosati, JD
Executive Director, Hawaii Family Forum

Re: **Strong Support for SB 2246 SD 2 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth**

Hawaii Family Forum (HFF) is a non-profit, pro-family education organization committed to preserving and strengthening families in Hawaii. The Hawaii Catholic Conference (HCC) is the public policy voice for the Roman Catholic Church in Hawaii, which under the leadership of Bishop Larry Silva, represents over 210,000 Catholics in Hawaii.

As many of you know, HFF works on a variety of family issues ranging from domestic violence, affordable housing, homelessness, children's access to health care, physician assisted suicide and traditional marriage preservation.

What you may not know is that finding families for Hawaii's legal orphans is also a top policy and direct service priority.

As such, SB 2246 SD 2 is among our top priorities because its passage will have a profound impact on the ability of Hawaii's legal orphans to be adopted into forever families – for life. Failure to pass this bill will leave in place an unintended but perverse systemic disincentive that prevents older, waiting orphan children from being adopted.

Please allow me to explain.

Hawaii Family Forum and HOPE In the Name of Christ (INC) foster care and adoption agency have a contract with the Department of Human Services to recruit, train, and support adoptive parents for Hawaii's 'difficult to place' foster children.

These are children whose lives have taken a typically tragic path that looks something like the following scenario:

PAGE TWO

- They've been abused, neglected and/or abandoned by their birth parents, the very people who are supposed to protect them in life from such tragedy
- Their birth parents parental rights had to be terminated so they would have a chance at a safe and happy life
- They've been in more foster homes than anyone cares to count for more years than any child should ever endure
- They now live in temporary foster homes, waking up every day knowing that they could move that day and knowing that the family with whom they are living with won't adopt them.

These children are usually older and have special needs and challenging behaviors because of the trauma they have been through in their short lives. During the process of trying to find adoptive families for these minors, we have encountered countless cases where foster parents tell us that they won't adopt the minor in their care because "if we adopt, the child will lose the benefits they get by staying in the system as a foster kid." The primary benefit mentioned: higher education.

The failure to extend the higher education benefits to former foster children who get adopted is a policy literally trapping foster kids in the system. The policy operates like golden handcuffs, preventing too many of our foster kids from achieving the permanency and security of an adoptive family.

Let me tell you about a few of the children whose entire lives and futures are being adversely affected by this unjust policy: (Names are changed to protect confidentiality)

- 12 year old Krystal has been in foster care her whole life. Her foster parents refuse to adopt her, opting instead for guardianship because they don't want her to lose higher education benefits. Instead, she is losing her only chance for a permanent, forever family of her own. If we had adoption parity and the benefits followed into her adoptive family, Krystal would have a family.
- 17 year old Joshua's adoptive parents waited to adopt him until he was 18 so that he wouldn't lose his college benefits
- Social workers told us not to bother trying to find adoptive families for the young teens in their caseloads because they don't want them to lose their college benefits: so instead they lost their opportunity to be adopted

We urge you to change this unfair policy.

In addition to supporting the above change, we also support the other provisions in SB 2246 SD 2, increasing the time limit for application for a higher education board allowance and increasing the maximum age for the benefit from 21 to 26 years with a maximum benefit length of 60 months. Given the start these kids have had in life, many need a little extra time to finish their education. It is worthwhile giving them the extra time as higher education is among the key ingredients helping them rise above their traumatic beginnings.

Please support these changes and eliminate this inequity, promoting adoption parity by extending higher education benefits to foster kids blessed to find forever adoptive families.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2246 SD2
RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD ALLOWANCES
FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony on SB2246 SD2 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowances for Former Foster Youth, in strong support of the bill.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii is the largest non-profit provider for direct civil legal services in the State. Further, since 1996, we have assisted over 2,000 children as guardian ad litem on Oahu, Maui, Hawai'i, Moloka'i and Lāna'i, a significant number of whom have aged out in foster custody.

Based on our experience, we believe that this bill is important to improving the prospects for former foster youth. Currently, former foster youth are at much higher risk than the general population of becoming homeless, incarcerated, involved in violence, or to re-enter the system as parents of abused and neglected children. Higher education board allowances have been a strong step in the right direction towards helping youth transition successfully. Higher education board allowances relieve much of the financial burden of going to college and relieve some pressure on youth to enter the job force with no training and few prospects. Utilization of these payments has helped many youth become successful adults.

Unfortunately, the narrow window on entering the program has left many youth out who would benefit from the payments. Many youth, on turning 18, leave with a desire for freedom and a reluctance to be involved with "the system" or, even more sadly, leave without even knowing what benefits and services are available. After a year or two of "freedom," they realize that they are not capable of surviving on their own—or are faced with homelessness. Expanding this program will enable those youth who didn't go to college or job training programs immediately after exiting to have avenues to escape the poverty that often accompanies a young adult with no training, no skills, and no support system. Passage of this bill will further the goal of transitioning our foster youth and helping them become healthy, productive adults.

For these reasons, we support SB2246 SD2.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

M. Nalani Fujimori
Deputy Director
527-8014



FOSTER FAMILY PROGRAMS
OF HAWAII

Date: March 10, 2008

To: Honorable Maile Shimabukuro, Chair Human Resources & Housing
Honorable Jerry Chang, Chair Higher Education

FROM: Linda Santos, President & CEO, Foster Family Programs of Hawai`i

RE: Senate Bill 2146
Hearing: March 13, 2008, 8:30

Purpose: Senate Bill 2246, SD – Extends the timeframe in which a former foster youth may apply for a higher education board allowance. Provides former foster youth who are between 22 and 26 years of age as of July 1, 2008, and who are already attending a higher education institution, the opportunity to apply for a higher education board allowance within a year. Increases the maximum age for the benefit. Sets a maximum benefit length of 60 months.

Introduction: I am Linda Santos, President and CEO of Foster Family Programs of Hawaii. We provide services to prevent foster care placement; support children and families involved in out of home placement; and assist young adults emancipating from the foster care system.

Agency Position: Foster Family Programs of Hawai`i strongly supports this bill which expands the opportunities for former foster youth to continue their education.

Foster youth are highly under represented in higher education and among college students. Research demonstrates that too few of the foster children who complete high school apply for entry into postsecondary education. Low expectations by their caretakers and low self-esteem among foster children may play a part, as does lack of information or counseling on how to apply and lack of information on how to obtain financial aid.

From my years of experience with foster youth transitioning out of foster care, the reality may be that most foster children may not be ready to attend post secondary education, directly out of high school. The most successful foster youth I have seen, are those that mature first and continue school at a little later in life. I believe that foster youth will have a higher success rate in completing college if they can begin when they are ready, rather than directly after completing high school. Similarly, most youth need more than the traditional 4 years to graduate from college and it is even truer for youth who have been in care. Allowing 60 months to complete their education plan will increase the number of youth graduating.

The fact is that foster youth are highly under represented among college students. “Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth” indicates that there are approximately 300,000 foster youth between the ages of 18 and 25, including those who have aged out of the child welfare system. Only about 150,000 of these foster youth have graduated from high school and are college qualified, and of these college-qualified foster youth, only one in five is attending college. Let’s give Hawaii’s foster youth a little more time to grow up and succeed in higher education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



Hale Kipa

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*Neighbor Island Board
Liaison*

March 10, 2008

To: Representative Maile Shimabukuro, Chair, Human Services and Housing Committee
Rep. Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair, Committee on Human Services & Housing
Members of the Human Services and Housing Committee

Representative Jerry Chang, Chair, Higher Education Committee
Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair, Committee in Higher Education
Members of the Higher Education Committee

From: Jaque Kelley-Uyeoka, Deputy CEO-Outreach Services, Hale Kipa, Inc.
808 589-1829 x201

Testimony on SB2246 SD2: Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Scheduled: March 13, 2008; 8:30 am, Conference Room 329

Hale Kipa, Inc. appreciates the opportunity to express its support for this Bill (SB2246) which extends the time frame in which a former foster youth may apply for a higher education board allowance. It provides former foster youth who are between 22 and 26 years of age as of July 1, 2008, and who are already attending a higher education institution, the opportunity to apply for a higher education board allowance within a year. It also increases the maximum age for the benefit and sets a maximum benefit length of 60 months.

Hale Kipa is advocating for the passage of this Bill.

Hale Kipa has been providing services to youth and their families for the past 37 years. It has been deeply concerned about youth who grow up in the foster care system and find themselves woefully unprepared and unsupported to make the transition into self-sufficiency.


Hale Kipa has Foster Care programs and works with the Department of Human Services to implement its Oahu Independent Living Initiatives. Through Hale Kipa's history of working with youth transitioning out of foster care, it's become clear that not all youth know what they want to do upon high school graduation and thus do not begin their college studies immediately. At the same time, many do enroll in college, find out they are not ready or do not have the necessary supports and drop out prematurely. Other youth begin college and need remedial studies, which extends their time needed to complete their studies while others, due the frequent disruptions during their adolescence, start college at a later age and won't graduate until after they are 22 or older. In each

of these instances, it is important to continue to encourage and have opportunities and resources available for these youth to complete their college education.

This Bill would prevent former foster youth from dropping out of school due to lack of financial resources but rather allow them the needed time and financial support to successfully achieve their college education.

We appreciate your willingness to consider this Bill and encourage you to pass it and provide benefits to a deserving special needs population.

Sincerely,



Jaque Kelley-Uyeoka, ACSW, LSW
Deputy CEO-Outreach Services
Hale Kipa, Inc.



March 11, 2008

To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair and Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair and members of the Committee on Higher Education

From: Blake Lanoza, Youth Outreach Coordinator and President of the Board, Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition.

Re: Support for S.B. 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Aloha, my name is Blake Lanoza and I am a former foster youth. I was taken into foster care when I was eleven years old because of a drug abusing mother. I never knew my father. I was placed into a few foster homes and soon ended up being adopted by abusive foster parents. I lived in that house for five years of my life and received beatings that one could only imagine. I was not only physically abused, but verbally and emotionally abused and used for child labor. I thought this was what a normal family was supposed to be like. I ended up being saved after five years because someone from the school turned in my adoptive parents after another foster youth in the same home went to school with a broken finger she got from being beaten.

I found a reason to live shortly after I left foster care. I found the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition. I decided I wanted to devote my life to changing the system that I thought would kill me because it was so hard to go through. I knew I needed a college degree so I can make a career out of making the lives of foster youths better. I applied for the higher education allowance just two weeks before the end of my one year waiting period. Many youths don't make that deadline. That is one of the reasons S.B. 2246 is so important.

I was taken from my parents because they could not care for me. Because I was under the custody of the state, I consider the State my parents. Just like many biological parents, the state (my parent) takes care of me. I benefit from the higher education board payment for foster youth. The way it works now is foster youth turn eighteen or graduate and age out of the foster care system. After that, we get 1 year to decide whether or not we want to attend an institute of higher education. Then, if we do decide, we get to have the board payments for four years or until we turn 22. I know that not all youths can finish their four year degrees in four years. It is harder for young adults that are completely on their own to finish in four years. The extra time that the bill provides would help us former foster youths complete our bachelor's degrees or begin our masters.

It is hard to live in a state with one of the highest costs of living in the nation and the lowest unemployment rate. One of my biggest anxieties is worrying about how I am going to survive after the higher education payments run out. I have the good fortune to work full time for the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition. But that is still not enough to allow me to save for the future even with the higher education allowance. I live from month to month like many people in Hawaii. I am a hard worker, having held two and three jobs at a time so I don't become homeless. I will do any job to make it. But I believe my education is the most important thing. I am grateful to have the higher education benefit. It would help me longer and many other foster youth to stay focused on school and have food to sustain us and keep the roofs over our heads while we complete our degrees if S.B. 2246 is passed.

H.B. 2043 gives the next generation of youths three years to decide what they want to do with their lives. I think that foster youths don't often know what they want to do with their lives right after high school. They are confused, scared, and don't know who to turn to. Higher education payments help youths stay in touch with their support system by having a payee like an independent living program.

Thank you for reading my testimony and having said that, I urge you to not only pass S.B. 2246, but to advocate for it because it really will lead to a positive change in the futures and help ensure the successes of Hawaii's former foster youth.

Thank you,

Blake Lanoza
203-4721



March 11, 2008

To: Reb. Jerry L. Chang, Chair Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair and members of the Committee on Higher Education

From: Vanessa Melendez-Makimoto, Historian of the Board, Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition.

Re: Support for S.B. 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Hi, my name is Vanessa Melendez Makimoto and I am 21 years old. I am in my fourth year at the University of Hawaii. I will be graduating in May 2008 with a Bachelor's of Education.

I am a former foster youth who, at the age of 18, began receiving the state's higher education allowance of \$529 for living expenses. I have about one half of a year left before I graduate from college and will stop receiving the state's higher education allowance.

One of my future goals is to teach in a local elementary school. However, I would like to pursue my education a little further by receiving my master's degree so that I am better equipped to be an effective teacher and so that I will have a greater opportunity for higher pay with my career.

Living on my own, going to school full-time, and working part-time has been a challenge and I know that if it were not for the financial help I receive, I would not be able to do all of it. My part time job is minimal compared to the state's higher education allowance I receive every month and the scholarships and grants I receive for school. If it weren't for these monies, I would not be able to support myself the way I am doing now.

I am supporting this bill in that I would like to see the age limit of 22 years for receiving allowance for former foster youth who are going to school, extend to past that age. Twenty-two years is the age that students are intended to finish a four-year degree, but I know that many students take longer than that for many understandable reasons. Although I am fortunate enough to be able to finish within this time period, I would like to have the option open to me to further my education if I wish, and to know that I can still live independently. Without this help, I am realizing that pursuing a master's degree is unlikely because I will need to begin working right after graduation. I hope that there will be some change in the law so that former foster youth can have more opportunities available to them to advance in their education and to be able to compete with the high demands the workforce has on education.

Please pass S.B. 2246 Relating to Higher Education Board Payments for foster youth as it will ensure the success of our state's foster youth.

Mahalo,
Vanessa Melendez Makimoto
P.O. Box 12207
Honolulu, HI 96828



March 11, 2008

To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair and Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair and members of the Committee on Higher Education

From: Adrian Gilliland, Vice-President, Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition.

Re: Support for S.B. 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Hello members of the committee. My name is Adrian Gilliland and I'm a former foster youth. I believe that this bill is the most important bill relating to foster youth this legislative session. As a foster youth that was in care I had no ideas about what I would want to do after high school. I think that most youth either in foster care or kids living with their families don't have a clear idea as to what they want to do for the rest of their lives. Unfortunately for foster youth, we don't have the luxury of having parents to back us financially in our attempts at a post high school education. This is why I believe that the extended time for eligibility gives us the ample opportunity to take the time we would likely need to decide what area we like to go to school for.

I personally didn't have the chance to take time off after graduating from high school to make a decision as to what area I might want to work in. So instead I went straight into college without a clue as to where I wanted to go. I don't necessarily blame the deadlines for going to college for the many unfortunate events that happened to me after enrolling in Maui Community College. Many bad decisions and lack of proper judgment led to me being arrested and spending the duration of the next four months in the Maui County jail reflecting on where my life was heading.

During the time that I was in college I was receiving the Higher Education Board Payment of \$529. That money was a life saver in so many occasions. It helped me to pay my rent and at the beginning of the semester before my grant monies had come in I was able to purchase my books for college. When real life after high school hit, I quickly realized that I wouldn't be able to live strictly off of scholarships and grants. Because being a full time student is not sufficient enough to actually live off of in this wonderful state. I had to get a part time job in order to just stay afloat.

If there was ever a piece of legislation that was and is as important as this bill I would hope that the trusted leaders of this great state would realize the significance of this bill. Upon entering foster care it is the assumed responsibility of the state to provide the foster youth with all the necessities that a nurturing parent would. Those necessities don't end at the age of 18 when the youth is transitioned into

the real world with a handshake and a "good luck." For many of us who want to make something of our lives we have only one of 2 options. Go to school or go to school. There really is no other options that I've found in the 20 years that I've been alive. I humbly ask that you the decision makers of the State of Hawaii take care of your children unlike the many irresponsible parents that have placed us in your care. Please vote in favor of S.B. 2246.

Mahalo for your time,

Adrian Gilliland



January 31, 2008

To: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair, Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair, and members of the Committee on Human Services and Public Housing

From: Sarah Baptist

Re: Support for SB 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

My name is Sarah and I have recently been put into foster care. I am only 13 but I do know that someday I would like to go to college. I hope that SB 2246 can be carefully looked at because I think that for some kids it might be a hard decision to know if they want to go to college or not right out of high school. If they decide too late than they might not ever get to go because they wouldn't be able to afford it.

It is hard to know that I don't have the help and guidance of my parents the way some kids do and if SB 2246 is passed than I will have hope that I too can get a college education.

Thank you for listening
Sarah Baptist



March 11, 2008

To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair and Rep. Joe Bertram III, Vice Chair, and members of the Committee on Human Services and Public Housing

From: Ryan Baptist

Re: Support for SB 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Aloha my name is Ryan and I only recently went into foster care, however I do think that as frightening as it can be to go into foster care that we should have all the advantages that are possible so that we can grow up to have a good life.

Most kids get to have their parents to help them with finances and to give them some time to think about going to college, I guess the foster kids don't get those same chances and I think it would be helpful if they did.

I think that to help have a good, productive life it would be a good opportunity to go to college. I have been told through the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition that I will be able to get this higher education money to help me when I graduate from high school, and as confusing as life can be in the foster system it might be nice to have a little more time to get to our goals. That is why I am asking for you to vote for SB 2246 it might help a kid like me.

Thank you for your time
Ryan Baptist



March 11, 2008

To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair, Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair and the members of the Higher Education Committee

From: Kathy Bowles

Re: Support for SB 2246, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

As the Resource Community Coordinator for the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition, and a foster mother of two teenagers, I would like to speak out on the behalf of foster youth needs.

Through the last 10 years I have worked with foster youth, and most specifically youth that desired to obtain higher education. The pit falls that I have personally witnessed came about in large by the fact that many foster youth were not ready to take the leap stright to college right after graduating from high school. It seems unreasonable to give foster youth such a small window to make life altering decisions.

Through the years another senirio that I have encountered is that many foster youth are not aware that there are funds for them to go to college, some do not find out until it is to late.

I truly believe that if S.B. 2246 is passed we will give so many more opportunities to the derserving young people of Hawaii. With the extenition of higher board payments the undo stress that falls on the former foster youth will also be reduced. The pressure of finishing college in four short years, even in the best of circumstances, is not normally obtainable.

Please consider giving these deserving former foster youth a better chance of attaining their goals by voting in favor of S.B 2246.

Mahalo
Kathy Bowles



March 11, 2008

**To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair and Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair
and members of the Committee on Higher Education**

From: Tiffany Lynch Ma'e. 18, Former foster youth.

Re: Support for Bill S.B. 2246 relating to education for foster youth.

**Kia Ora my name is Tiffany Lynch Ma'e and I am a former foster youth
from the island of Molokai.**

**My biological mother and step father we're both alcoholic drug-addicts
put two and two together and all you have room left for is, verbal,
physical, sexual abuse and neglect.**

**Being in such an unhealthy environment I made a decision to be
placed in foster care, with hopes that the "system" would give me
more room to excel in life. Not knowing that I would be continuously
fighting to beat the statistics of typical foster children (i.e.
Homelessness, alcohol and drug abuse, suicide, school dropout and
career criminals.)**

**Through my experience in foster care I've learned that in one way or
another there is always some kind of catch 22, to prevent you from
reaching your goals.**

**Thus I made the decision, to dedicate my life, to help improve Hawaii's
foster system.**

**During my 4 year stay in foster care, I was placed in 8 different
foster homes. I was placed in every single district on Molokai, East,
West, North, South, you name it, I was there.**

Fortunately enough Molokai has only one High School, which allowed

me to excel academically. I graduated twice with honors, in Hawaiian language and regular Ed. In my opinion being able to continue my education and the same school has helped me not only academically and characteristically, but it also improved my social skills and self esteem. I know of a few former foster youth that, unfortunately, didn't have the opportunity to continue their education at the same school, but rather, because of foster placements, they we're forced to change schools on regular basis, leading to as mentioned above school drop outs, homelessness, drug addiction, suicide or or becoming career criminals. I think that Bill S.B. 2246, will improve current foster youths self esteem and social connections, later enabling them not only to excel academically but in life as well, which in return will gradually decrease the negative statistics stereotyped to foster children.

I urge you to help and pass bill S.B. 2246, because I truly believe it can ensure a stable environment for Hawaii foster children. Please help us, help them.

Thank you for your time,

To: Rep. Jerry L. Chang, Chair and Rep. Joe Bertram, III, Vice Chair and the members of the Committee on Higher Education

From: Melody F. Rolnick

Date: Hearing held on Tuesday, March 11, 2008.

Subject: Bill S.B. 2246 Relating to Higher Education Allowance for Former Foster Youth.

I have been a member of The Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition (HFYC) for six months. HFYC is a youth led organization run by current and former foster youth aged 14-24. In Our Maui Chapter, we have 35 active members. This coalition helps me to voice my opinion and advocate for foster youth, help give back to other foster youth, and builds my self esteem. The Maui Chapter of the Coalition strongly supports bill HB 1356 that changes the eligibility requirements to receive higher education board payments for former foster youth to attend college from a maximum age of what is currently 22 to 26 years of age.

Financial support for transitioning youth through their college years is inadequate. Foster youth usually don't have parents saving for years for a college education nor a family that can help with day-to-day costs of living. The Higher Education Foster Board Payments enable youth to attend college and focus their efforts on their education without having to worry about a place to sleep at night or food to eat. The problem with current Higher Education Foster Board payments is that it restricts the opportunity for foster youth to receive these monies by mandating application and receipt of the Board Payment and attendance of College before age 21.

I am fortunate enough to have a lot of inner strength that has helped me to preserve and attend college only 3 days after my High School graduation. I work with many different youth through both HFYC and the EPIC "E Makua Ana" Youth Circle Transitional Planning Meetings and often see other foster youth that are not as ready as I was to make the commitment to higher education for many reasons. Many foster youth who have recently aged out of care are ready to start exploring the real world and experiencing life outside of foster or group homes. It may take these youth a couple of years to realize the beneficial aspects of higher education and actually pursue it. Other youth, such as myself, have gone to Non-Public Schools and are not educationally ready to endure rigorous college requirements right after high school. Still, other foster youth, by nature of being a Ward of the Court, are not emotionally ready to face college.

As a foster youth from California who came to Hawaii in my teenage years through an Inter-State Compact between the state of CA and HI, I am not eligible for Higher Education Payments through Hawaii, although I would be able to put the funds to good use. It pains me to see youth that are eligible for the funds but not ready for college or enroll in college pre-maturely solely in order to receive these funds. According to Mark Spiegel, Independent Living Coordinator for the Island of Maui through Maui Youth and Family Services, within the past two years, 8 out of 13 youth from Maui that pursued

higher education immediately after high school, mainly in order to obtain the board payments, dropped out of school, on average, in one month. Many of these youth are further discouraged from ever pursuing higher education again.

Due to the lack of funding for people working with foster youth on the outer islands, many other youth are not informed of the Board Payment opportunity until after they reach the age limit.

The current system is obviously not working. Please vote in favor of S.B 2246 which would extend the eligibility age for Foster Board Payments to 26 years, and give foster youth more time to make the decision to attend higher education. Investing time and money in the youth of today creates a perpetual cycle of productive citizens that benefits the country of tomorrow.

Thank you for hearing this testimony,

Melody Rolnick
PO BOX 144
Kahului, HI 96733

From: pohakalani@gmail.com [mailto:pohakalani@gmail.com] **On Behalf Of** Poha Sonoda-Burgess

Sent: Wednesday, March 12, 2008 10:22 AM

To: HSHtestimony; HEDtestimony

Subject: Support for S.B. 2246 S.D. 2 Relating to Higher Education board Allowance

To: The Honorable Maile Shimabukuro, Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Housing
& The Honorable Jerry Chang, Chair
House Committee on Higher Education

From: Poha Sonoda-Burgess, Volunteer
Ho'olokahi Parent Facilitator Program
Family Court of the First Circuit
P.O. Box 3498
Honolulu, HI 96811
Tel. (808) 539-4111

Subject: Support for S.B. 2246 S.D.2 - Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Purpose: Expands the eligibility and opportunity for former foster youth to receive financial assistance in connection with pursuing and completing a post-secondary education.

Position: I strongly support this bill. As a native Hawaiian graduate student, I found it immensely difficult to continue my post-secondary education, even with the assistance of my family and native Hawaiian financial aid resources. I would not have been able to finish my baccalaureate degree without my parents assisting me with my car insurance, bills, or bailing me out of money troubles when I was short on rent.

The fact of the matter is that we, the people who do have a support system have a much easier time attending college. We have life lines in case we fall back on bills; we have places to stay while going through college or if we get evicted. We sometimes have the luxury of deciding to remain full-time students and devoting our time to study instead of being part-time students and full-time employees at multiple jobs.

These former foster youth do not have these luxuries. Statistics show that those who complete post-secondary degrees are far more likely to become upstanding, independent, tax-paying citizens. Without the support of the State, it becomes more and more difficult for former foster students to build a secure educational, economic and social foundation.

Also, I would rather have my tax dollars supporting these former foster youths through a higher education allowance, rather than potentially supporting them through welfare

payments. Even adopting these changes would not pose a significant burden on the State, as very few former foster youth take advantage of this program. It is important for the State to make available this resource to those former foster youth who choose to utilize this resource.

By removing the eligibility requirement of attending college within a year after high school graduation, it will give more opportunities to former foster youth who have not realized the importance of higher education, or have not had the ability to enroll in a school of higher education within the time period. Empirical research has shown that even people with the means to enroll in college often do not follow the model of matriculating to college right after high school. Many young adults follow their own path and eventually make their way to college after an epiphany, or disgust with the current jobs.

I also support the change in duration of the higher education allowance to 66 months to reflect the average amount of time to graduate from 48 months to 66 months.

Let's not make life more difficult for the former foster youth who need the access to post-secondary education that many of us have had. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

Malama,

Poha Sonoda-Burgess

Jane E. Seymour
2092 Kuhio Ave. Apt. 1105
Honolulu, HI 96815

March 11, 2008

To: House Committee on Human Services & Housing
Representative Maile Shimabukuro, Chair
Representative Karl Rhoads, Vice-Chair
House Committee on Higher Education
Representative Jerry Chang, Chair
Representative Joe Bertram, III, Vice-Chair

From: Jane Seymour, MSW student, UH Manoa; Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem

Re: Support for SB 2246 SD 2
Thursday, March 13, 2008 at 8:30am in House conf. room 329

The purpose of this bill is to increase the opportunities for former foster youth to pursue higher education by allotting them more time to apply for the higher education board allowance and extending the maximum benefit length. I strongly support this bill. I am currently an MSW student at UH Manoa, a practicum student with the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem Program, and a VGAL for five children.

Foster youth who age out of the system are significantly less likely than their peers to graduate high school or attend college. As adults, they are also at a much higher risk for becoming homeless, living in poverty, being incarcerated, and having a substance abuse problem (Casey Family Programs). By providing our youth with greater opportunities to participate in higher education, we are increasing their chances of becoming self-sufficient, successful adults.

Many youth who are aging out of the foster care system are focused on experiencing the freedom and choice they did not feel while they were involved with the system. It is important to remember that these youth have experienced tremendous trauma in their lives, and they may not be ready for the demands and pressure of higher education; they may just need some extra time for self-exploration and discovery.

I am currently the Volunteer Guardian Ad Litem for two teenage girls who will soon age out of the foster care system. They are very motivated and intelligent girls who have hopes of furthering their education. However, these girls have experienced many challenges in their lives and despite their admirable goals, both are still unsure of their exact plans after high school. This bill would give these smart, resilient young women, along with many more former foster youth, more time to pursue a degree in higher education and would thus increase their chances for future success.

I strongly urge you to pass SB 2246. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sheryl A. A. Mita
3245 Pawaina Street
Honolulu, HI 96822
(808) 988-6669

Representative Maile S. L. Shimabukuro, Chair
Representative Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair
Committee on Human Services and Housing

Hearing Date: Thursday, March 13, 2008

Support of SB 2226. S.D. 1, Making an Appropriation for the State Commission on Fatherhood

Chairs Shimabukuro and Members of the Committee on HSH:

I am Sheryl Mita and I am a student at the University of Hawaii at Manoa in the School of Social Work pursuing a Bachelor's Degree. I am testifying in support of SB No. 2226. S.D. 1, Making an Appropriation for the State Commission on Fatherhood, which would appropriate funds to support the operations of the state commission on fatherhood. The bill also gives recognition of the important roles fathers play in the lives of children, families, and communities. I am an only child who has been raised most of my life by my father and this type of recognition would be significant.

When it comes to familial relationships, I believe that the father-daughter relationship has become less influential than the mother-daughter relationship. However, in my life, my father and I have maintained a healthy, close relationship. He took on the role as not only my father, but as a best friend. Throughout my life, my father's support and involvement helped me to succeed in my endeavors, such as graduating from high school and being accepted into the University of Hawaii.

The funds appropriated to support the operations of the state commission on fatherhood will recognize a key figure I have looked up to in my life. I support the committee in the measure of S.B. No. 2226. S.D. 1. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.