

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair
Senator Jill Tokuda, Vice-Chair
Senate Ways and Means Committee

From: D. Keala Naluai, Windward O'ahu, Substitute Teacher
PO Box 4982
Kaneohe, HI 96744, 239-1281

Tuesday, February 26, 2008
10:45 a.m., Room 211

RE: Support of **SB2878_SD1**, "Relating to Early Learning"

I am in support of this bill for an Early Learning System and Keiki First Steps Program. I hold a DOE Substitute Teaching Certificate and have been teaching for 4 years, including SPED classes. I have taught special needs, special education students' preschool to 6th grade and regular preschool to 6th grade classes in the Windward O'ahu Castle Complex. I hold a bachelor's degree in psychology and a master's in business administration.

Many children do not have preschool learning experiences before entering kindergarten. With the growing numbers of preschool children on waiting lists for private, public and/or free preschool education and the shortage of classes to provide this service to 3 and 4-year-olds, our current early childhood teacher and qualified education assistant resources are seriously lacking. I see the struggles in the classrooms of those young students who have not had pre-kindergarten learning experiences. Many are behind in grade level readiness capabilities and in some cases the effects carry on into the first grade, sometimes second and third grades, which then put these children at a critical disadvantage to "catch up" to grade level competency and in a situation for special education needs services. This problem is growing and may be a contributing factor to some scoring lower in the Hawaii State School Readiness Assessment (HSSRA).

We will need to increase the number of qualified early childhood teachers and preschools as soon as possible with **adequate incentives to increase and retain our early childhood teacher workforce** by providing educational scholarships, grants and loan forgiveness. Our public university will also need incentives to provide expanded access to early childhood education courses and certification. To ensure program improvements for higher quality learning, early childhood programs will need sufficient funding to implement higher quality teaching programs with the help of an Early Learning Council.

I support this measure. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.