

Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
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Human Services and Public Housing Committee
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Support of SB 3055, Relating to Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect

The mission of the University of Hawaii, School of Social Work is to contribute to the advancement of social work practice for the purpose of preventing or resolving the most critical social problems, reaffirming social work's historic commitment to increase social justice and availability of opportunity for underrepresented and oppressed groups. I strongly support S.B. No. 3055, Relating to Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect, which would broaden the group of persons required to report child abuse and neglect to include family members.

Family members, as members of our society, should be required and accountable for the reporting of abuse and neglect of children. Family members are closer to their children than any outside professional. Before any report is made by mandated professionals as established in the reporting statute, Chapter 350, Child Abuse, the family members will more likely witness the abuse and neglect first. The continued cycle of abuse and neglect that many children go through could stop even before others outside of the family notice it. Statistical reports prepared for the year 2006 by the State of Hawaii, Department of Human Services, reflects that in 88.3% of all confirmed cases of abuse and neglect, the perpetrator was a parent of the victim. If family members were to be held accountable, these high percentages will decrease because of the societal and legal pressure. As of 2006, only 8.4% of all the cases were reported by parents and relatives; this is a very low percent. If family members are to be required by law to make reports, I strongly believe that many of these victimized children will be helped before it is too late and if needed kept out of those abusive lives.

Even though there are established Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting laws, this act would broaden the protection to many more of Hawaii's children. Some will inevitable argue that such a policy need not be mandated since professionals such as physicians, psychologists, schools employees already are reporting these cases. But if more and more individuals are added to the list of mandated reporters, less and less children will be harmed.

In expanding the reporting requirement to family members, we are creating a safer environment and healthier family foundations for the children of Hawaii. I urge the committee to pass this proactive act; S.B. No. 3055. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

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