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March 21, 2008

To: Senator Norman Sakamoto, Chair, Senate Committee on Education; Senator Jill N. Tokuda, Vice Chair; and members of the Committee

From: Arkie Koehl – Chair, Public Policy Committee, MADD-Hawaii

Re: SCR 220 – Requesting the Department of Education to consider continuing Project Graduation training through Driver Education underwriters' fees as part of traffic safety education.

I am Arkie Koehl testifying on behalf of the membership of Mothers Against Drunk Driving – Hawaii, in support of SCR 220.

MADD Hawaii has been a strong supporter of Project Graduation since we were introduced to the concept in the 1980s and especially since it became a project of the Department of Education in 1990. MADD is familiar with the training necessary to enlist the aid of parents from schools across the state and to equip them with the skills, information, and contacts necessary to plan and produce a successful Project Graduation alcohol-free event.

Graduation is a huge milestone for high school students and it is only natural that graduation night is a long-awaited time to celebrate with friends in the most festive way possible. In the past, graduation night celebrations invariably included alcohol and occasionally a highway tragedy would result and forever mar the occasion for the family, the school and all its graduates. As SCR 220 pointed out, there are no longer deaths and serious injuries of graduates on graduation night – thanks to the work of the Project Graduation coordinator and the many parents and community members who make events in 50 high schools truly life-saving and memorable experiences.

Training is an absolute essential part of Project Graduation and MADD Hawaii favors using some of the Drivers Education funds to support the training component since the Federal grant is ending. Project Graduation has become a wonderful way for the community and parents to come together to ensure that graduates reach their future. We urge the committee to pass this resolution.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Date of Hearing: Monday, March 24, 2008
Committee: Senate Education
Title: (In support of) SCR No. 220, Requesting the Department of Education to Consider Continuing Project Graduation Training Through Driver Education Underwriters' Fees as Part of Traffic Safety Education

My name is Joanne Swearingen and I recently retired from the Department of Education as administrator for the Accreditation and School Improvement Section. Formerly, I've also served as DOE state program manager for the driver education program. As a supporter of public education and parent involvement in the public schools, I am also currently serving as chairperson of the Kaimuki High School Community Council, Scholarship Chairperson for the Kaimuki High PTA, and Jarrett Middle School Foundation Board member. In the past I've served as Hokulani PTA president, Jarrett Band Parents Association president, Kaimuki High PTA president, and on the Hawaii State PTSA Board as Honolulu region director. I also served on the Project Graduation committees at Kalani High School and Kaimuki High School.

As noted in the Resolution, Project Graduation is one of the three high school activities in which parents get involved. Though parent participation in school activities is generally good at the elementary level, it tapers off at middle school, and is almost non-existent at the high school level, despite efforts of school staff, with the exception of band, athletics, and Project Graduation.

High school graduation is a really important event for both students and parents in Hawaii. Why do parents support Project Graduation? Because it's a great gift that you can give to your child: A safe way to have a great time, possibly for the last time, with your high school friends and classmates. A safe way to spend your graduation night **without** drinking and driving and getting into accidents because you feel so "high." A safe way to surprise your child with "fun" activities that they don't know about until Project Graduation starts.

Because there is a new group of parents every year that plans Project Graduation for their children at the more than 50 public and private high schools that currently conduct Project Graduation, **it is critical that Project Graduation training be offered for parents every year.** The Department of Education has been doing this since 1990 through a Department of Transportation federal grant for this traffic safety education activity. Since the grant is ending in September 2008, it is important for the DOE to continue this annual training for parents. State law allows driver education funds to be used for traffic safety education activities, including training parents for Project Graduation. I strongly support the passage of this Resolution encouraging the DOE to continue Project Graduation training for parents through driver education funds.

Date of Hearing: March 24, 2008

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent of Education

Title: S.C.R. 220, Requesting the Department of Education to consider continuing project graduation training through Driver Education Underwriters' Fees as part of Traffic Safety Education

Purpose: Requests the Department of Education to consider funding Project Graduation (PG) training activities through the Department's driver education funds, as allowed by statute; and to submit a report to the Legislature on how the Department is continuing PG training after the cessation of its federal grant.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) supports this resolution as long as funds to support Project Graduation training does not replace the current Board of Education funding priorities. Should funds be available, the Department will provide a report to the 2009 Legislature.