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February 5, 2008

Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Members of the Human Services Committee
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 315
Honolulu, Hi 96813

Re: HB 1354, Relating to TANF

Dear Representative Mizuno:

I am Gail Breakey, Director of the Hawaii Family Support Institute testifying in support of HB 1354.

I will not repeat testimony presented earlier in this hearing about the importance of restoring funding for the Healthy Start program.

I would like to comment on the contribution that these TANF funds have made to program development for Healthy Start. The clinical specialists have contributed a great deal in intervening with very high risk families related to substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues as well as strengthening a team approach to these issues. Some programs have been able to engage families pre-natally, with good results. A new in-home parenting curriculum, the Nurturing Program, was developed and instituted by the training team.

In regard to future use of these funds, it is clear that in this time of economic downturn, these funds will be sorely needed as part of the effort to maintain services for the highest risk families. The service providers are in the process of developing a more streamlined assessment process and services that will actually intervene with only the highest risk families, those with scores of 40 and over on the Family Stress Checklist, who according to the validation study on the Checklist have a 50% likelihood of becoming a child welfare case.

Thank you very much for your serious consideration of allocating these funds to the Healthy Start program.

Sincerely,

Gail Breakey

J



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To: Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair and Members of the Committee on Human Services

Date of Hearing: Thursday, February 5, 2009

Time of Hearing: 8:30 am

Place: Conference Room 329, State Capitol

Testimony: In support of HB 1354 : RELATING TO CHILDREN

Good Morning Representative Misuno, Representative Brower and members of the House Committee on Human Services.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to present this testimony to your Committee on Human Services. My name is JoAnn Bishop Freed. For the past twenty-five years, I have been involved with Hawaii's Healthy Start Program, first as a volunteer and now as the Executive Director of Family Support Services of West Hawaii, a community-based non-profit organization on the island of Hawaii whose mission is "to support families and communities in providing love and care for our children."

Family Support Services of West Hawaii has been a provider of Healthy Start services to families on the island of Hawaii. Based on our increasing knowledge of best practice in the field of infant mental health and brain development, we have also begun to support infants and toddlers and their families who have been brought to the attention of Child Welfare services through the Enhanced Healthy Start Program.

Since I began to be involved with the Healthy Start program, the amount of scientific information concerning the unique psychological, psychobiological, and neurobiological phenomena that occur in the early stages of human life has rapidly expanded. We now know for a fact that the developing infant is maximally vulnerable to nonoptimal and growth-inhibiting environmental events during the period of most rapid brain growth. During these critical periods babies are sensitive to conditions in the external environment, and if these are outside the normal range a permanent arrest of development may occur.

Current research on the neurobiology of attachment reveals that the early experiences of female infants with their mothers (or absence of these experiences) influence how they respond to their own infants when they later become mothers, and that this provides a psychobiological mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of adaptive and maladaptive parenting styles and responsiveness.

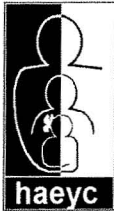
Abuse and/or neglect over the first two years of a child's life negatively impacts the major regulatory system in the human brain, causing an enduring impairment of social and moral behavior due to a "disruption of the systems that hold covert, emotionally related knowledge of social situations"

The latest psychoneurobiological developmental models which focus on the effects of early environmental interactions on evolving brain-behavior relationships also emphatically stress the fundamental importance of early intervention. Early interventions have lifelong effects on the adaptive capacities of a developing self. These efforts like Enhanced Healthy Start can make deep inroads into not only altering the intergenerational transmission of psychiatric disorders but improving the quality of a life throughout the lifespan. Social and political commitment to early treatment and prevention programs would thus be a major contribution to the problems our societies are now facing.

Hawaii has been seen as a leader in the area of early intervention services for children and families. I strongly support House Bill 1354 which appropriates funding for the additional support needed by infants and toddlers and their families who are or have been involved in Child Welfare Services. Multi-generational, family-centered approaches offer the most promising models for preventing and treating mental health problems in young children. The prevention of life-long consequences from these adverse childhood experiences lies in our ability to take a flexible, comprehensive and collaborative approach to family support.

As a resident of a neighbor island whose child abuse and neglect rates remain well above those in the state as a whole, I am grateful for this opportunity to support a bill that provides a safety net for our most vulnerable citizens—our infants and toddlers. They and their families who live in our most rural and isolated areas of the state are currently facing even more challenges than before and need your help more than ever.

I sincerely thank you for your caring.



Hawai'i
Association for the
Education of
Young
Children

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To: Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Representative Tom Brower, Vice Chair
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

From: Shelley Ng, Vice President of Public Policy for
Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (HAEYC)

Date: Thursday, February 5, 2009
8:15a.m. Room 329

Subject: HB 1354, Relating to Children

Aloha Chair Mizuno, Vice-Chair Brower, and esteemed members of the House Committee on Human Services.

As the vice president of public policy for the Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (Hawaii AEYC), I represent 1,000 members who are early childhood development and educational professionals across the state. My name is Shelley Ng.

Hawaii Association for the Education of Young Children (Hawaii AEYC) supports HB 1354 to enact program changes to Enhanced Healthy Start by authorizing funds from Temporary Assistance for Need Families to the Healthy Start program, including Enhanced Healthy Start.

While Hawaii AEYC's domain is in the early child care and education setting, we know it is essential for parents to be able to provide a safe, healthy, and happy home environment especially in their newborn's early years. A young child that has been raised in a chaotic, stressful environment will likely have more difficulty with learning, expressing emotions appropriate to situations, and in developing healthy relationships. Healthy Start provides parents with positive parenting skills and knowledge, access to material assistance, emotional and social support, and specialized, therapeutic help when it is needed. Healthy Start assists stressed out parents become more resilient so that they may provide their children a safe, healthy, and home. These are essential prerequisites for success in early child care and education, not to mention success in kindergarten and beyond. We want all of Hawaii's children to be successful with a Healthy Start.

Please recommend HB 1354 for passage.

The volunteers and staff of Hawaii AEYC would be happy to provide you more information to facilitate your decision-making. Please contact us at 942-4708 or haeyc@hawaiihaeyc.org.

Thank you for considering this bill.

Our mission is to promote, support, and expand quality and professionalism in early childhood programs and services for Hawai'i's young children (0-8) and their families.

Testimony of Camille Rockett
Masters of Social Work student, University of Hawaii at Manoa
Before the House Committee on Human Services
February 5, 2009

My name is Camille Rockett, and I'm an MSW student at UH Manoa. I am testifying in support of HB1354.

This bill would prevent the elimination of the Healthy Start program in Hawaii. Healthy Start is a home visiting program for at risk families with children ages 0-3. This program promotes child development, healthy parent child interaction, and is a link between families and early intervention services. Healthy Start also provides parents with clinical therapy services and access to resources like food, clothing, diapers, toys, books, housing assistance, emergency utilities assistance, and employment seeking information. Eliminating Healthy Start would inhibit access to such resources for a segment of our community which is at the highest risk for poverty, child abuse and neglect, and developmental delays.

As a former Healthy Start Family Support Worker who witnessed the strengths and weaknesses of this program firsthand, I strongly believe this program makes a positive impact on families and children. Unfortunately, I have seen research that suggest that Healthy Start has no impact on Hawaii's at-risk children and families, and these studies have put the program on the chopping block. I do not wish to spend my time questioning the measurement and research methods of the studies, but instead I would like to share my experiences in how I saw families and children benefit from Healthy Start.

As a Family Support Worker in Wahiawa's Healthy Start Program, (one of the sites that was not included in the aforementioned research), I have seen that Healthy Start is essential to the livelihood of many families. I have seen a family about to be evicted by a corrupt landlord avoid sleeping on the streets when their FSW utilized legal aid, ensuring they weren't kicked out unlawfully. One of our mothers would not leave her house with her son for over a year, but due to the outreach of her worker, started coming to group meetings and finally realized that her two year old was severely delayed compared to other children. Because of this, she was able to receive a diagnosis and a skills trainer for her son through Early Intervention. I have personally helped families access food, diapers, and child development material that they would have otherwise gone without. I have advocated to save my client's baby's life when the doctors and nurses at the NICU seemed to be forcing her to take him off his ventilator. I have also assisted a homeless family find housing and get help with their deposit, while seeing how regular visits and development information helped their baby progress from failure to thrive to thriving and beginning to meet milestones. I hate to think what would have happened to these children without our Wahiawa program.

This program makes a real difference in real families here in our communities.

These families are living right on the brink of losing their housing or going without food. There are no other programs that will meet these families where they are and provide access to such a diverse pool

of resources. As stated in the Senate bill, "Children's brains are approximately ninety per cent developed by age three, and to a great extent their earliest experiences define their adult functional capacities." We must not wait until these families are homeless, overburdened, and starving to provide intervention. We cannot wait until abuse occurs to send in family support workers. We must value preventive services for our keiki and pass HB 1354.

Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair
Representative Tom Brower, Vice Chair
Committee of Human Services

Support of HB 1354 Relating to Children

Aloha,

I am a mother of three children and currently a MSW student at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa. I strongly support HB 1354 which would appropriate funds for the Healthy Start Program and the Enhanced Healthy Start Program and implement the recommended changes.

This statewide program identifies and monitors high-risk children from birth to age three and provides home-based outreach services through home visits. It is designed to prevent child abuse and neglect, promote healthy families, and ensure healthy child development among high-risk infants and toddlers.

There are families who need additional support especially those with issues such as: substance abuse, domestic violence, and mental health. Also in need of support are children who have a confirmed case of abuse and neglect. Clearly these families are at a high risk of harm within their family and a long-term home-based intervention is necessary.

I support the program changes of HB 1354 and believe that this population needs the additional support provided through the Enhanced Healthy Start Program.

Prevention programs are often taken for granted and may appear as an "extra" service rather than a necessary service. Caution should be used with this ideology. The Healthy Start Program ensures children are healthy, in a nurturing environment, and encourages parents to be good role models not only in their own family but everyone they are in contact with. It is about the opportunity to make a positive difference in the lives of children and their parents that will pass on to the next generation. Taking away and cutting services to children and their parents will have serious consequences in both the short-term and long-term.

Prevention programs such as Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start should continue to be funded and available to ensure healthy children, healthy families, healthy communities, and a healthy State. I urge you to reflect on the larger issues that will develop if this program is not funded.

The State of Hawaii has a responsibility to give our keiki a Healthy Start.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Kerri Kahapea-Aquino

I, Matthew Simmons UH School of Social Work, support H. B. 1354.

Committee on Human Services

Thursday February 5, 2009 @ 8:15 am

Inevitable are the hard economic times faced by the majority. And even more prevalent is the gap between rich and poor. As we face these economic crisis' it is important to note that the most affected are the most vulnerable populations that desperately need our help. As we see more and more local businesses such as Aloha Airlines and Molokai Ranch close, the number of foreclosures on houses rise, and inflation remaining strong, it is imperative that we continue to provide necessary aid to the families in our communities that need it. While continuing to provide essential healthcare, education, employment, support programs and economic assistance, we must also be diligent in creating reserves for further economic downturn.

Our communities and families are the backbone of our society and it is our duty to ensure that families have every working opportunity to remain self sufficient and strong. We can achieve this through the further funding of TANF with the realization that cutting back these expenditures in a time when they are needed the most leaves Hawaii's families vulnerable without the emotional and economic stability that ensures families their self-sufficiency.

This includes Hawaii's Healthy Start program, which is designed to help combat child abuse and neglect through promoting child development among vulnerable populations. As economic times worsen, our communities experience an increase in child abuse and neglect. Healthy start has become an important and much needed resource for the families that have trouble creating bonds with their children, experiencing substance abuse, domestic violence, depression, mental illness, and financial difficulty.

Through Healthy Start parents and children often receive practical support in the form of food, clothing, and housing and employment support, which is much needed now. This loss of support would resonate through generations in the guise of increased child abuse and neglect, social and health problems, financial burdens on society, loss of human capital and work force. It is my hope that we can continue to properly support the families in our communities that will need our help.