

HB 1354



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MĀNOA

April 5, 2009

Senator Donna Mercado-Kim Chairperson
Ways and Means Committee
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

Re: HB 1354, Relating to Children

Dear Senator Mercado-Kim:

I am Gail Breakey, Executive Director of the Hawaii Family Support Institute testifying in support of HB 1354, to continue TANF and general funds for the Healthy Start program, and TANF funding for Enhanced Healthy Start.

Healthy Start is a public health approach to preventing child abuse and neglect, and promoting healthy development among infants and toddlers at risk for abuse and poor developmental outcomes. The program is unique and unduplicated in that it screens all families of newborns pre-natally or at birth in hospitals across the state and enrolls those at risk and in need of support on a voluntary basis into the Healthy Start program in their community. Home visiting programs provide a range of family support services to strengthen family parenting capacity and improve outcomes for vulnerable children.

- **It is the only program in Hawaii that reaches out to families providing help right from the start, before abuse or neglect occurs.** Other services are provided after problems have started.
- **It addresses risk factors to reduce risk and improve parenting capacity.**
- With additional economic stresses on already overburdened families, **this safety net for our most vulnerable infants and toddlers needs to be restored.**

There are many reasons why Healthy Start is important and needs to be restored.

1. Healthy Start (HS) is effective in averting abuse, strengthening families and child development.

- **Out of 4,000 high risk families served in 2009, only one HS target child was confirmed by CPS for abuse;** other reports were primarily for threatened harm as an alert and to bring in additional resources for the families.
- Children are much safer with home visitors in the home. Potentially dangerous situations are spotted early before abuse occurs or escalates into more serious problems.

2. Healthy Start is cost effective. Significant costs will result from eliminating the program.

- The Department of Human Services currently estimates that child welfare related costs for high risk families not served preventively are about \$783,888 per family, some studies show higher estimates. **If there had been no Healthy Start services in 2008, short term costs would total at least twice the annual cost of the program.**

3. Healthy Start is critical to development of human capital. The science of early childhood shows that early intervention services like Healthy Start are critically important in assuring that dis-advantaged, high risk young children do not have adverse early experiences and that they arrive at school healthy and ready to learn.

- Much research in early brain development show that the experiences in the first years of life lay the foundation for future development, for better or worse. Nobel Prize winning economist James Heckman notes that “while many young children are bathed in an atmosphere that promotes well being and learning, increasing number of children

are not.” He states that **we can tell by age five which children will and will not succeed in school and college.**
(NYT Op-ed, July 2009).

Services like Healthy Start are critical to both reduction in social and economic costs of social and health problems and also to development of human capital **Early childhood experts and economists agree that children are our greatest resource and must be protected.**

Recognizing that most services will need to be down-sized in the current economic environment, the Healthy Start providers are working with the Department of Health on a more streamlined model, with a shortened assessment process and provision of in home services to only the highest risk families. This will result in significantly reduced costs.

Enhanced Healthy Start serves families with very young children after a report has been made to child welfare. The program has multi-disciplinary staff to work on treatment issues of families who usually have substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues. **This program does not have screening capability to reach out to families pro-actively at birth.** Enhanced Healthy Start services are provided within the same agencies as Healthy Start.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill. I hope that you will agree that investing in our most vulnerable infants and toddlers is a critical function and that funding for Healthy Start must be restored, and funding for Enhanced Healthy Start continued.

Sincerely,

Gail Breakey, Executive Director
Hawaii Family Support Institute

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TO: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Shan S. Tsutsui, Vice-Chair
Members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee
Hawaii Capitol
Honolulu, Hawaii 96873

FROM: Leahne Toscano, MSW Student
University of Hawaii – DE Program
West Hawaii Campus

DATE: March 28, 2009

RE: **In Support of HB 1354 HD2 SD1- RELATING TO CHILDREN**

Description: Appropriates Temporary Assistance for Needy Families funds and general revenue funds for the early childhood intervention programs of **Healthy Start** and **Enhanced Healthy Start** programs, to maintain current services, to hire additional staff and for provider training. Effective 7/1//20 (SD 1)

My name is Leahne Toscano, and I am an MSW student with the University of Hawaii-Distance Education program on the island of Hawaii. I am providing this written testimony in **strong support of bill HB 1374 HD 2 SD 1**. The purpose of Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start is to provide “at-risk” families with the skills and support needed to nurture their child’s development from birth to age three. Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start programs provide the critical safety net in protecting one of our most precious resources – the children or “keiki” of Hawaii. The primary reason that I am in support of this bill is that **THESE PREVENTION PROGRAMS WORK!** We must protect our keiki BEFORE abuse and/or neglect occurs, and prevention is the key. In fact, the Healthy Start program began in 1985 as a child abuse prevention project for children ages zero to three. In 2001, the program expanded statewide due to the positive outcomes achieved. After 2001, the national Healthy Families America program was created based on the Hawaii Healthy Start model. The Healthy Families America program has expanded into over thirty states nationwide, as well as Canada and the Philippines. **Without appropriation of adequate funds and continued support for Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start here in Hawaii, these early childhood intervention programs are at risk of being eliminated.**

In West Hawaii, my practicum placement is with Family Support Services of West Hawaii (FSSWH), and Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start are part of this community-based, non-profit agency. FSSWH was formed in 1979 by a concerned group of professionals and community members, and their continued mission is to “support families and communities in providing love and care for our children.” Over the years, FSSWH has been quite effective in forming partnerships and collaborating with other helping agencies to utilize limited funding streams and avoid duplication of services. However, budget cuts have been felt at the Healthy Start program here in West Hawaii, and workers have already been laid off. It is so sad to see

the reductions in staff and services – especially knowing that these Healthy Start workers have their own families to provide for with bills to pay and difficult economic times ahead. One of the most serious issues we face here in West Hawaii is that there are no other existing programs that provide the same essential services to the vulnerable children and families currently being served through Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start.

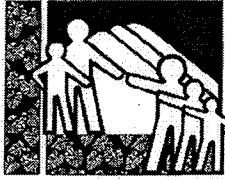
The Hawaii Healthy Start program is designed to prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting healthy child development among vulnerable populations. Last year, it was estimated that Hawaii Healthy Start served more than 4,000 children statewide, and the positive impact on these families is evident. Healthy Start focuses on teaching positive parenting skills, promoting healthy parent-child interactions, and providing high-risk families with needed resources and services to ensure positive developmental outcomes for children. At the time of a baby's birth, a screening tool called the "Family Stress Checklist" is used to determine a parent's risk of abusing/neglecting their child. Families who score high on the checklist are referred to the Healthy Start program, and parents participate in services voluntarily. The Healthy Start program provides parents with a comprehensive array of early childhood intervention and parenting education services within the family's natural home environment. Additionally, families are provided with linkages to other community resources in order to reduce stress in the family.

Enhanced Healthy Start serves families that are involved with Child Welfare Services (CWS), as these families have already been identified through the CWS system. Without the services provided by Enhanced Healthy Start, participating infants and toddlers face uncertainty, instability, and are "at high risk" of abuse or neglect by their parents and family members.

These two programs are essential components in preventing child abuse and neglect among our families in Hawaii. With the hard economic times ahead, parents and children need all of the support available to them. With increasing stress on families, neglect and abuse of children is likely to rise. That is why these vital programs cannot be eliminated, since we need to be vigilant in supporting families during these trying times. The long-term costs to our children and our society cannot be underestimated if prevention programs are cut now.

Both Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start use a "strengths-based approach" that focuses on positive outcomes for children, healthy family functioning, and establishing community connectedness to prevent child abuse and neglect. With the downturn in the economy and the increased stress on families during these trying times in our state, these programs are critical to ensure a safety net is created to keep young children safe in their family homes. These programs are preventive and provide the needed support and strengths-based perspective our families so desperately need at this time. This bill appropriates needed funding for the Healthy Start and Enhanced Healthy Start programs in Hawaii, and it is my strong belief that without these programs, many more social problems will be created including increased child abuse and neglect, domestic violence in families, substance abuse, and increased financial stress on our Hawaii economy. **The lives of our most vulnerable and precious resource – our children – may be irrevocably damaged unless you support this bill.**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on HB 1354 HD 2 SD1.



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To: Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senator Shan Tsutsui, Vice Chair
Members of the Committee on Ways and Means

Date of Hearing: Monday, April 6, 2009

Time of Hearing: 9:30 am

Place: Conference Room 211, State Capitol

Testimony: **In Strong Support of HB 1354 : RELATING TO CHILDREN**

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."

There has been a lot of talk recently about sustainable energy for the future of Hawaii. We seem to be willing and able to pay for projects that contain these words, but I must ask, of what use will these projects be if we are unable to keep the lights on in the eyes of our children.

On the island of Hawaii, where Family Support Services of West Hawaii has been a provider of Healthy Start services to families for the past twenty five years, the poverty rate for children is currently at 18% and rising. That means there are nearly 500 children born into poverty each year on our island. Compared to children living in our more affluent communities, children living in the poorest 20% of the districts in Hawaii County are five times more likely not to have access to prenatal care, have a mother without a high school education, and be on food stamps or other financial assistance. Children in the poorest communities are also twice as likely to score below the lowest level of the educational assessment 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. 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.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Aun Bishop Keed". The signature is written in dark ink on a light-colored background.



Testimony on HB 1354, Relating to Children
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Chair: Sen. Donna Mercado Kim Vice-Chair: Sen. Shan S. Tsutsui
Monday, April 6, 2009, 9:30 a.m., Room 211

By Howard S. Garval, President & CEO, Child & Family Service

We must protect our keiki from child abuse and not just after the fact when abuse has already occurred. Hawaii had the incredible foresight to recognize that child abuse prevention is a great investment to make when it invented Healthy Start back in 1984. By 2001 the program was deployed statewide. It has been replicated in over 30 states under Healthy Families America because other states recognize the value and efficacy of the program.

There are multiple reasons that Child & Family Service wholeheartedly endorses HB 1354. Let me outline these below:

- Healthy Start works. In FY 08 for families that stayed 12 months or more in the program, over 99% had **no** report of child abuse! This exceeds child abuse rates that are higher nationally and in Hawaii.
- Healthy Start works with families in which at least one parent is at substantial risk of abusing and/or neglecting her/his baby/child. A scientifically validated checklist called the Kempe Family Stress Checklist is used to determine parental risk of child abuse. Only those families who score at a high enough level (scores of 30 and above) are referred to Healthy Start. Therefore, the program is working with high risk families and getting a terrific result as noted above.
- In Hawaii, Johns Hopkins University has been evaluating the program for many years. This has led to significant program improvements/enhancements that have strengthened the program. It also has helped to define a group of “anxious” mothers for whom Healthy Start has been very effective. For these moms, Healthy Start helped reduce child



abuse by 60% and child neglect by 56%. This longitudinal evaluation was done using a control group which is the most valid form of evaluation.

- For a cost of \$3,000 per family, Healthy Start served over 4,000 families in FY 08. Estimates are that without Healthy Start services, 13% of the children would end up being abused. If one assumes 4,000 children who would be at risk if Healthy Start is eliminated, then 13% of that is 520 children who are likely to be abused. If you were to add up child welfare services costs including investigation, foster care, mental health treatment, potential future juvenile delinquency and school dropouts, the costs to the state would be substantial and would likely wipe out any savings achieved through program elimination.
- Hawaii would also walk away from **\$4.5 million** if Healthy Start is eliminated. Healthy Start bills under the Early Intervention Special Funds and draws down about **\$1.5 million** in Federal Medicaid reimbursement each year. Also, **\$.5 million** would be lost that comes in to the state from CAPTA and is allocated to the Children's Trust Fund managed by the Hawaii Community Foundation. Because of Hawaii's success in Healthy Start in having a research partner (Johns Hopkins University) with the Maternal Child Health Branch of the Department of Health, DOH recently was awarded a highly competitive grant from the Federal government of **\$2.5 million** over 5 years. If Healthy Start is eliminated, the state would be walking away from a total of **\$4.5 million** in revenue from other sources other than the state.
- While the state faces a significant budget shortfall, it makes no sense to eliminate a successful program where the cost to the state will only be higher if the services are no longer provided. Even reducing the program makes more sense than outright elimination. This ultimately would lead to fewer families being served and will heighten the risk of child abuse for



some children, but is less damaging than no services at all to this high risk population.

- Very few programs that the state funds can match the rigorous evaluation and research that Healthy Start has had. Nationally there is growing research that documents the effectiveness and importance of home visiting programs in preventing child abuse. Even if Healthy Start is not perfect, this does not explain elimination. In fact if the state accepts the \$2.5 million from the recently awarded grant, Healthy Start can be strengthened even further so it can be even more effective.
- In addition to preventing child abuse, Healthy Start achieves certain other important outcomes such as: ensuring the family has a medical home, providing prenatal care for subsequent pregnancies for Healthy Start parents, performing developmental screening for a high percentage of one year olds and two year olds. Since children with special needs are at considerably higher risk of child abuse, it is important that special needs are identified early and referrals can then be made to appropriate service providers.
- While the Governor is to be applauded for trying to prevent layoffs of state employees, HB 1354 could soften the impact of or actually prevent layoffs in the nonprofit organizations that provide Healthy Start services throughout the state of Hawaii. Eliminating Healthy Start would result in the layoffs of 200 employees statewide among the six providers of Healthy Start services. Our estimate of the unemployment costs would be \$2.4 million. This assumes a mix of paraprofessional and professional staff who would be laid off statewide if the program is eliminated with an estimated \$300+ in unemployment payments to paraprofessionals and \$545/week for professionals for 30 weeks under the new federal extension of unemployment benefits.



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- There is no equivalent or duplicative program to Healthy Start. Enhanced Healthy Start only gets involved when the family is an active CWS case and abuse and/or neglect has already occurred. Therefore, if Healthy Start is eliminated, at least 4,000 families in Hawaii who are at risk of child abuse and neglect will not receive services. There is no other program that would pick up these families and it is likely that the family won't be known unless they end up as a Child Protection case with CWS or when the children are ready to enter school. By then, if there was abuse and/or neglect, the trauma and damage to the child(ren) will have already occurred and it will be more expensive to treat.

For all of the reasons stated above, Child & Family Service strongly supports HB 1354 that restores funding through state general operating funds and TANF funds to the Healthy Start Home Visiting program. We can continue to intervene early to prevent child abuse and strengthen families, or we can pick up the pieces only after abuse and/or neglect has occurred when the damage is already done that may have lifelong consequences for children. I urge you to opt for the former by restoring funding to the highly successful Healthy Start program.