

February 12, 2009
1:45 pm
Conference Room

LATE

TESTIMONY TO
THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC HOUSING

Re: SB 1329 relating to Early Learning
Early Learning Council; Trust Fund

Authorizes the Hawaii Council of Mayors to name designees for their two representatives on the early learning council; changes the name of the keiki first steps trust fund to the Early Learning Council trust fund and moneys in the trust fund shall not lapse at the end of the fiscal year.

Dear Chair Chun-Oakland, Vice-Chair Ihara and members of the Committee:

My name is Christine Jackson and I am here as the spokesperson for the Early Learning Council. The Council appreciates the opportunity to give full support of SB 1329 relating to Early Learning. As I speak the rest of the Council meets to move important work forward for which passage of this legislation is critical.

In 2008, the Legislature established the Early Learning Council because it found the state needed “a cohesive, comprehensive, and sustainable early learning system that ensures a spectrum of quality early learning opportunities for young children from birth until the time they enter kindergarten.” (Act 14, p. 6 & 7) It charged the Council with creating a system that was widely accessible, of high quality, accountable and sensitive to family choice and cultural elements in Hawaii.

As authorized by Act 14, the Council has just begun its work. While it has successfully created procedures for governing and operating along with a sub-committee structure to support the Council’s work plan, it is now ready to hire an Executive Director to move the initiatives ahead. This bill will allow the Council to continue its work into the next year as it offers a means to support operating expenses by transferring unused and unencumbered funds to the trust fund. In so doing, it paves the way for plans that will ensure that the learning needs of our children and families will be addressed in our state as the Council continues its work.

The Council recommends two changes or clarifications in the bill as it is currently written. First, we would suggest expanding the designee alternates beyond those of the Mayors to also include those of the Governor’s appointees. This change will ensure representation of all of the voices on the Council and a medium for on-going communication from the Council to the appointees. Secondly, we are recommending the name of the trust become the “Early Learning Trust” to reflect the broader scope of its work beyond that of the Council *per se* and the giving of Keiki First grants. The Council respectfully requests these changes in language in the bill.

Recognition by the Legislature that early education is a key factor in the lifelong success for all children and for our state's sustainability was clearly demonstrated when it created the Early Learning Council through Act 14. The council is committed to meeting its charge to create a comprehensive early learning system for children age 0 – 5 and to seek additional public and private funding mechanisms that will be required to do so. The passage of this bill will allow it to continue that work. Thank you for this opportunity.