

SUPPORT

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LATE
Testimony

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN RESOURCES

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RE: HCR 14 & HRS

Good morning Chairman Mizuno and Members of the Committee. I am Jacqueline Chong, Chair of the Na Tutu, Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Coalition. I have been a member of the Legislative Task Force of Aging in Place for the past two years, concentrating especially on the Grandparents Raising Grandchildren issues.

There are many issues that grandparents have when dealing with the bureaucracy that seems to envelope them every time they turn around, from the educational system, the medical services, to the eviction threats in housing. Today, though, I am concentrating on the social workers, or case workers as this resolution states.

The case worker graduates from college and all she knows is how to fill the blanks on a piece of paper. She's young, many times unmarried, no children, doesn't even know what life beyond the college walls are about. But she has her degree and knows the questions that must be asked. And those questions are many times embarrassing for grandmothers who are the primary caregivers for their grandchildren. She hesitates, or more times than not, doesn't know how to answer, which means to the young case worker that Grandma is not willing to cooperate.

Grandparents who are raising grandchildren are unique people. They have already raised a generation of children, and are now on their second or sometimes third generation. They are loved and respected by their families. In Hawaii, they stand alone. For that is our culture, the hanai system, the Ohana system. Whether you are Japanese, Chinese, Portugese, Filipino, or Hawaiian, and sometimes you are all of the above, your Tutu's are beloved. How many times in your lifetime have you hung your head when she is raising her eyebrows or frowning in your direction? And how many times has she hugged you and planted a big kiss on your cheek, and on those of your friends who are hanging around?

Social workers, case workers, are not taught about grandparents, or the hanai system, the Ohana system that is part of our culture in Hawaii. They have not been made aware of the close relationship between grandparent and grandchild, oftentimes the relationship is closer than between a child and parent. Social workers/case workers need to know the stress that grandparents are going through when parents are divorcing, or ill, or incarcerated, and children are in the middle of all the problems; that grandparents are fearful that their grandchildren will be taken away to live in a strangers's home. Social workers/case workers need to learn to respect the grandparents for the knowledge that they have learned through their lifetimes and that of their children and grandchildren, for who knows more about their family than the grandparents.

Social workers/case workers need to learn the culture that they are going into so they can work successfully with families. There are over 14,000 grandparents caring for grandchildren in Hawaii, that was the census count in 2000. It's a growing population, and Hawaii is the leading state in the nation of grandparents raising grandchildren. We need social workers/case workers who can understand the needs of Hawaii's grandparents and grandchildren. The 2010 census will tell us how many more grandparents are raising grandchildren today. Please let us have social workers/case workers who can help us care for our grandchildren.

Thank you.