



Senate HMS Committee
Thurs, Jan 28, 2010
1:50 pm
room 16

National Association of Social Workers

Hawaii Chapter

January 26, 2010

TO: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Members of the Senate Human Services Committee

FROM: Debbie Shimizu, LSW
National Association of Social Workers, Hawaii Chapter

RE: SB 2033 Making An Appropriation for General Assistance- **SUPPORT**

Chair Chun Oakland and members of the Senate Human Services Committee, I am Debbie Shimizu, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Hawaii Chapter. I am also a member of the Financial Assistance Advisory Council (FAAC) of DHS. NASW is the largest professional organization for social workers in Hawaii.

NASW supports SB 2033 Making an Appropriation for General Assistance.

The General Assistance program (GA) provides cash assistance for adults who are temporarily disabled. With this assistance they are able to pay for rent, pay utilities, buy clothing and other essentials that they need to live. Last year, the amount of cash assistance was \$469/month, however, because GA is a "block grant" and there was an increase in the number of individuals who applied for assistance, the amount of assistance had to be reduced to \$234/month. This year, the Department budgeted GA payments to be \$450/month but because of the state's fiscal crisis, payments are at \$300/month. This is hardly enough for anyone to survive. Can you imagine yourself living on \$300/month? An appropriation of \$6,066,000 for FY 2010-2011 would increase the monthly payments to \$450/month.

This appropriation is only for one year. The bigger policy question that must be discussed is whether GA should remain a block grant. Last year we began discussions making GA an entitlement program like the ABD program (SB 1668 SD2 relating to Human Services). The Department and the Financial Assistance Advisory Council both agreed to work on making GA an entitlement program to avoid having to cut payments in the middle of the year when the number of applicants increases. GA recipients have a difficult time with rental payments when their assistance checks continue to fluctuate. Landlords also depend on a consistent source of payment. It would be beneficial for all.

We all are affected by the difficulties of this economic crisis, but those who are the most vulnerable and have the least to survive truly need our help.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

chunOakland5 - Michael

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Tuesday, January 26, 2010 12:39 PM
To: HMS Testimony
Cc: jfischer@hawaii.edu
Subject: Testimony for SB2033 on 1/28/2010 1:50:00 PM

Testimony for HMS 1/28/2010 1:50:00 PM SB2033

Conference room: 016
Testifier position: support
Testifier will be present: No
Submitted by: Dr. Joel Fischer
Organization: Individual
Address:
Phone:
E-mail: jfischer@hawaii.edu
Submitted on: 1/26/2010

Comments:
PLEASE PASS THIS BILL!!

If we do not provide an emergency appropriation for GA, it is tantamount to declaring WAR on the poor.

It was impossible to accurately assess the number of people who applied for GA recently; the block grant simply is running out of money.

We already are asking GA recipients to live on only \$200 to \$300/ month! That is cruel and unusual punishment!

Please find it in your hearts to support this bill. This IS the safety net; it is torn already. Failure to pass this bill means we are completely removing the safety net to ensure that our neighbors become desperate and ultimately fail.

Thank you,

joel