

Date: January 28, 2010

To: SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr, Vice-Chair

LATE

From: Teresa Bill ph: 956-9313

Re: SB 2033 relating to General Assistance
Thurs. Jan 28 2010 1:50 p.m.
Conference Room 016 1 copy to Committee Clerk, room 226

My name is Teresa Bill. **I support SB 2033.**

The General Assistance program is an important part of Hawai'i's safety net which allows individuals without minor dependents to receive some financial assistance while temporarily disabled. Many individuals are actually in the process of applying for federal disability benefits through Social Security Disability Insurance.

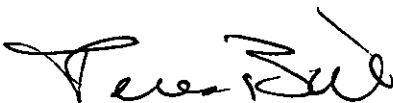
The current budget cuts at DHS have resulted in a severe reduction in monthly benefits to General Assistance recipients. Currently the approximately 5,000 individuals receive only \$300 per month, reduced from \$450 per month to expend the block grant funds amongst all participants. With the current block grant, when the budget appropriation is used, individuals' monthly assistance is reduced.

No one can live on \$300 a month! The Governor and Legislature is balancing the State's budget on the backs of those least able to stand up for themselves, including the temporarily disabled.

Additionally, I suggest that the Senate discuss **amendments to change General Assistance from a "block grant appropriation" to a straight entitlement program which would mirror the AABD (Aged, Blind, and Permanently Disabled) program.** This would also address the disjuncture between the funding mechanisms for GA and the AABD programs. Changing General Assistance from a block grant would mean that individuals would not have to worry about whether their monthly assistance will be maintain throughout the full year; that assistance levels would be maintained at \$450 per month which is 50% of the 2006 Federal Poverty Level for an individual. The Dept. has made a great effort to maintain General Assistance payments, and taking General Assistance off a "block grant" would make this effort easier. It should be policy that individuals eligible for General Assistance, who are temporarily disabled could expect a standard payment.

I support amending SB 2033 appropriating funds from the emergency and budget reserve to restore a \$450 per month benefit for General Assistance.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



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TESTIMONY – FULL SUPPORT SB 2033: GENERAL ASSISTANCE

TO: **Sen. S. Chun-Oakland, Chair**, Sen. L. Ihara Jr., Vice Chair, and Members,
Senate Committee on Human Services

HEARING: **Thursday, January 28, 2010, 1:50 pm; CR 016**

Chair Chun-Oakland, Vice Chair Ihara Jr., and members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this **Human Service** bill. I'm Kanani Kaaiawahia Bulawan, a case manager, social worker and a retired executive director of an organization that primarily provides comprehensive case management services to homeless and at risk of homeless individuals and families in the Leeward Community. I **FULLY SUPPORT** this bill which would restore general cash benefits to a more humane level amount than what is currently issued.

In Nov 2009 as the benefits were reduced to its current issuance, there were grave impact in the conditions that makes this population even more vulnerable to homelessness, as well as at risk of losing core services that would afford decent living conditions. The basic transitional homeless shelter in Kalaeloa assesses a fee of \$400.00 minimum per month studio for an individual. Clean and sober homes found it necessary to either triple or quadruple up in room space so that the cost of shelter and other expenses can be met, causing most of these individuals to be "evicted" from the supportive home environment while building better coping skills to meet the demands of society in a more responsible way. Ultimately putting them back into the ill environment that they once came from and is trying to recover from. Not to mention pushing them into crime just so that they may survive in society. People do desperate things in desperate circumstances, how much more desperate can we place them in?

Restoring the level back to what was is making some form of progress back to survival; however, I add that this level is still not adequate to meet the basic needs of an individual that has been deemed temporarily disabled and cannot meet their own needs without assistance. Let's return to our **HUMBLE BEGINNINGS** and be good humanitarians to our own brothers and sisters in our community. We should clean our yard before cleaning the yards of others.....

I commend the committee and chair for taking on this challenge to give vulnerable members of our society (family) a more decent chance at surviving with restoring the level of cash benefits from \$300. to \$450. per month. Mahalo for giving me this time and for hearing my concerns.