

**TESTIMONY TO
THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**

**Thursday, March 25, 2010, 3:30 p.m.
Conference Room 308**

RE: SB 2068, SD2, HD1 RELATING TO EARLY EDUCATION

Rep. Oshiro, Chair and Rep. Lee, Vice Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony about SB 2068, SD2, HD1 Relating to Early Education. My name is Robert Peters and I currently serve as Chair of the Early Learning Council. The Council was created through Act 14 passed in 2008. It is composed of public and private members charged with creating a comprehensive statewide early learning system to be called "Keiki First." I am here to offer testimony in favor of the bill.

The Council's support for this bill is based upon the original intent of Act 219, Session Laws of Hawaii 2004 which launched a Junior Kindergarten program beginning with the 2006-07 school year with the intent to enable Hawaii's children to succeed in Kindergarten and subsequent schooling by addressing their varying developmental and learning needs. To date, only about one-third of the schools have adopted a variation of the JK program and early findings indicate these children may be more appropriately placed in a pre-school type setting. This bill would authorize the DOE and the ELC to work together to develop a program to appropriately incorporate this cohort of children into the learning system recognizing their developmental needs, appropriate placement in early learning settings and criteria for assessing children to determine their eligibility for placement. Such a plan would lead to not only better and more appropriate placements but also increased chances of success transitioning to Kindergarten and later success in school.

Furthermore, the bill provides for a plan to address funding the costs for such a program and a timeline for implementation. Given the shrinking number of opportunities for young children, ages 3-5, to benefit from quality early learning experiences because of cuts in child care subsidies as well as screening programs, family support and planning programs, identifying means for keeping the JK cohort numbering close to 6,000 in the educational pipeline in the appropriate setting is critical. If we do not, we can assure ourselves that we will continue to see children entering a formal education system with lower levels of academic and socio-emotional readiness. The known impact of the deficits in socio-emotional readiness for learning have proven to have significant impacts on individuals and their communities ranging from increased retention and remediation in school to high rates of crime and recidivism.

The passage of this bill will help to prevent further erosion of the very foundation that the Early Learning Council is trying to preserve and upon which school success can be built. Passage will also keep us from falling further behind as we face the serious budget situation in our state.



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RE: SB2068, SD2, HD1 – Relating to Early Education

Chair Oshiro, Vice Chair Lee and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Witt and I am executive director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), which represents 99 private and independent schools in Hawaii and educates over 33,000 students statewide.

The Association supports Senate Bill 2068, SD2, HD1 – Relating to Early Education, which authorizes the DOE and the Early Learning Council (ELC) to work together to develop a program to appropriately incorporate children currently provided for in the State’s Junior Kindergarten program into a pre-school type setting.

Furthermore, our support for this measure is based on the proposed plan to address funding of the costs for such a program along with a timeline for implementation. We note the benefits derived for children ages 3-5 when given high quality early learning experiences, including enhanced readiness for entering our formal elementary schooling programs at DOE.

The passage of this measure will support the work of the Early Learning Council, its “Keiki First” mission, and will sustain efforts to prepare our young children for success in school by understanding, and providing programs in support of their developmental and learning needs.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

To: Representative Marcus Oshiro, Chair
Representative Marilyn Lee, Vice Chair
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

From: Elisabeth Chun, Executive Director
Good Beginnings Alliance



Date: Thursday, March 25, 2010
Conference Room 308

Subject: **SB2068 SD2 HD1:** Requires the Department of Education and Early Learning Council to work together on the development and submission of a plan to the Legislature for the integration of the cohort of children who would otherwise attend junior kindergarten into the early learning system.

The Good Beginnings Alliance (GBA) is a nonprofit policy and advocacy organization focused on Hawaii's youngest children and their families. We strive to ensure a nurturing, safe and healthy development for all children from pre-birth to age eight. We believe all children deserve safe and supportive environments that meet their needs as they grow and develop.

We support SB2068 SD2 HD1. The Junior Kindergarten (JrK) Program, while not perfect, is providing an early learning opportunity for a number of young children from at-risk families. We note that for School Year 2010-2011, approximately 58% (roughly 6,000) of the entering kindergarten in our public schools will meet the birthday criteria (August 1 – December 31 birthdays) to be considered for the JrK program. About half of these children will come from families whose income is low enough to qualify for preschool subsidies--below 185% (e.g., \$46,916 for a Hawai'i family of 4) of the Federal Poverty Level. Additionally with the recent Department of Human Services cuts in child care and preschool subsidies for low income children, JrK may become the only early learning option available for a number of these challenged families. These low-income families have limited options for their children.

GBA has been actively working on some of the working groups of the Early Learning Council in developing a comprehensive early learning system for Hawaii's young children, and we believe this bill's proposal to have the Early Learning Council and the Department of Education collaborate on an assessment of the JrK program is a good idea.

Mahalo for your support. For more information contact: Good Beginnings Alliance; Phone: 531-5502; lchun@goodbeginnings.org.