

**SB 2469**

**Late Testimony**

**Testimony on SB 2469**

RE: Emergency and Budget Reserve Fund

By

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Child & Family Service

Presented to Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Chair: Senator Donna Mercado Kim

Vice-Chair-Senator Shan S. Tsutsui

Wednesday, February 24, 2010, 10:10 a.m.

Conference Room 211

Good morning, Chair Senator Kim and Vice-Chair Tsutsui and Members of the Committee.

I am Howard Garval, President & CEO of Child & Family Service that provides services from keiki to kupuna on every island. We touch the lives of over 40,000 people in Hawaii each year. We have been delivering human services in Hawaii since 1899. We strongly support SB 2469.

First let me tell you a story. I was over visiting our programs and staff in Kona last week with one of our newer board members. We had lunch with a variety of program managers in the Kona office. I asked them how things were going in their programs. What I heard made me even more concerned about the impact of funding cuts on services to children at risk and domestic violence victims. I heard about a teenager whose parent choked her to the point of creating welts on her neck and yet when this was reported as part of mandated reporting, the case was not accepted for investigation. I heard about the impact of the 40% cut in our domestic violence services on the entire island of Hawaii. I worry about the lack of victim services that has resulted. This past week we laid off two more staff who were delivering important domestic violence services. I worry about all the children in at-risk families who we terminated services for when Healthy Start was decimated in July in spite of the Legislature's support for the program. Right now these families and children may be invisible and people can think there was minimal impact from the funding cuts, but those of us who know these families and children know that this is not the case. It is only a matter of time that these families will become child welfare services cases. It's only a matter of time when the next

domestic violence victim is murdered and leaves behind children with no parents. I worry about waiting lists for our treasured Kupuna because funding is inadequate to meet their need or to respond to the rapid increase of seniors in our community. These are just a few of the serious problems we believe are the result of both the funding cuts and the deteriorating economy and its impact on families.

As I understand it, the Emergency and Budget Reserve Fund, also known as the "Rainy Day Fund" was established for "times of emergency, economic downturn, or unforeseen reduction in revenues with the specific purposes of maintaining levels of programs determined to be essential to public health, safety, welfare, and education." I submit that it is very clear that if there ever was a time to access this fund, it is now.

I also want to add that it should not come down to a choice between education or human services. Many at-risk children will not succeed in school without the social services that support and strengthen families; programs like Healthy Start that intervenes early with at-risk infants and young children are as important as ending Furlough Fridays. What good is it to restore classroom days if the kids are so at-risk that they will not succeed in school without social services?

I believe all of us in the nonprofit human services community realize that the state faces serious challenges and we cannot sustain the same level of funding for services, but we need to protect the already severely reduced services to our most vulnerable citizens or the consequences will be tragic and even more costly.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.