

LINDA LINGLE
GOVERNOR



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LATE TESTIMONY

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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
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Statement of
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Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

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Room 325, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
S.B. 2473, S.D. 1
RELATING TO HOUSING

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) appreciates the intent of S.B. 2473, SD1 to allow children in a crisis situation to be put into the care of a grandparent when other alternatives do not exist. SB 2473, SD1 should be lauded for the visibility it brings to this growing issue. HPHA is keenly aware of the dramatic increase in the number of children who need to be rescued by their grandparents. The rise in grandparent-headed households reflects both a parent's understandable need for help with childcare and, in the worst case "parental failure."

HPHA has looked at this growing societal problem and has attempted to work within the constructs of the programs we administer to see if HPHA can offer a viable solution. We can accommodate temporary needs of a week or two through our current "visitors" policy, but in too many cases the need is not short term. We are proud to offer kupuna housing and believe we have an obligation to our current residents to retain housing for seniors as promoted and as funded. Therefore, to allow grandchildren into our housing would in fact violate our agreement with our senior residents. It must be understood that senior housing is not designed with relative-headed families in mind; most units are studio apartments, along with some small one-bedroom units. They do not include special features for both older people and children, and rarely have supportive services to help with the multiple barriers these families often encounter.

The Legislature should consider this bill with the full knowledge that by requiring HPHA to place an unknown number of children in state elderly housing for an indeterminate period of time, the state runs the risk of losing state elderly housing as it now exists, and turning all state public housing into family housing. The crisis situations contemplated in this bill are not necessarily temporary in nature, and there is no limit on, nor means to control the number of grandchildren who will move in with grandparents in elderly housing. This measure may result in children living with the grandparent from infancy until adulthood.

There are 4 state elderly housing sites, all on Oahu. State family housing is at 6 sites, only 2 of which are on Oahu, the 4 others being on Neighbor Islands. Grandchildren would be moving in with grandparents at 6 sites on Oahu, with only 2 family sites on the same island (as required by the bill) to which they could be transferred when vacant family units are available. The state

family housing projects on Oahu may be able to absorb 4 or 5 transfers from elderly housing per month. If more than 4 or 5 grandparents per month at the 6 elderly housing sites take in their grandchildren, they will have to stay and be raised in elderly housing. In addition, if grandparent transfers take all the available units at family housing, no one on the waiting list will be able to be placed in state family housing.

As time goes on there may be a growing number of grandchildren residing in the state elderly high-rises for years at a time. Given the large demand for public and affordable housing compared to the supply, we anticipate that there would be legal action at some point to establish that the elderly housing is, in fact, no longer qualified to be exempt from familial status discrimination claims under the Fair Housing Act, and that HPHA must accept as tenants anyone who applies. Placing children in the senior citizen buildings without time limit may, therefore, endanger the status of state elderly housing.