



Email to: HUSTestimony@Capitol.hawaii.gov
Hearing on: March 15, 2010 @ 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329

DATE: March 12, 2010

TO: House Committee on Human Services
Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Representative Tom Brower, Vice Chair

FROM: Dennis Arakaki, Executive Director

RE: SUPPORT FOR SCR 79 SD 1 Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Honorable Chairs and members of the House Committee on Human Services, I am Dennis Arakaki, **representing both the Hawaii Family Forum and the Hawaii Catholic Conference.**

Hawaii Family Forum is a non-profit, pro-family education organization committed to preserving and strengthening families in Hawaii, representing a network of over 250 Christian churches. The Hawaii Catholic Conference is the public policy voice for the Roman Catholic Church in Hawaii, which under the leadership of Bishop Larry Silva, represents over 220,000 Catholics in Hawaii. We support this resolution that urges the provision of orientation and additional training to increase the ability of state agency case workers to address the issues faced by grandparents raising grandchildren.

We know statistically and anecdotally that more and more grandparents are raising their grandchildren due to a variety of factors such as homelessness, divorce, substance abuse, and domestic violence. In most cases, grandparents provide a safer, more stable and more nurturing home environment. This has created a new family dynamic and a new paradigm on how services are provided to families. It is then incumbent on service providers to make adjustments accordingly.

It is important that grandparents who are burdened, often unexpectedly, with the responsibilities of child rearing to feel supported and encouraged, for the sake of the children. The communities of faith stand ready to help provide support, facilities and volunteers to help with this very important training for professionals and for the grandparents.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

TO: Committee on Human Services, Representative John Mizuno, Chair, Representative Tom Brower, Vice Chair, Representatives Della Au Belatti, Joe Bertram, III, Mele Carroll, Scott Nishimoto, Maile Shimabukuro, Ryan Yamane, and Gene Ward.

FROM: Patricia Urieff, MSW, Licensed Social Worker with thirty years of experience working with children and their families; parent; grandparent, Co-Chair for Legislative Appointed *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Task Force, August 2008 through December 2009.*

For Hearing on Monday, March 15 2010, 10:00 AM, in Conference Room 320, at State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street.

SCR79, SD1 (SSCR2675) URGING THE PROVISION OF ORIENTATION AND ADDITIONAL TRAINING TO INCREASE THE ABILITY OF STATE AGENCY CASE WORKERS TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES FACED BY GRANDPARENTS RAISING GRANDCHILDREN.

DHS Workers need help to understand and learn skills for how to communicate with grieving/distressed local grandparents whose grandchildren were removed and placed in state custody and foster care, a “system” grandparents have difficulty understanding.

Sharing in support groups and focus groups for GRG provided consistent stories about grandparent’s experiences with DHS Case Workers [related to children removed from parents to safety, often a grandparent wanted contact with own grandchildren or grandparent was the DHS Licensed Foster Parent]. Grandparents reported that workers did not listen to them nor treat them with respect, and workers made the painful casework situations worse.

Could be that out of state transplanted DHS Workers did not understand the local culture, nor values in local culture whereby the relationship between grandparent-grandchildren are near to sacred. In addition, given the complexities of the Federal “Safe Home and Adoption Act” [that dictates the course of a case when parents’ behavior results in children in state custody and foster care], DHS Workers may not understand grieving seniors in great distress, nor understand that grandparents need clear, simple information repeated regularly over the course of a Child Welfare Case (about 12 months).

Acknowledgement: DHS has implemented local cultural values in their staff training.

However, unless DHS provides orientation and staff training specifically about local grandparents and their experience of alarm when care of their grandchildren is dictated “by a system”, DHS Workers with none or little understanding of local grandparents won’t know how to effectively communicate nor relate to local grandparents feeling threatened because their grandchildren are in state custody and foster care. Absence of casework skills could result in conflicts with grandparents suffering grief and loss [as result of parents’ behavior, CPS involvement, and state custody of the grandchildren].