

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR



PATRICIA McMANAMAN
INTERIM DIRECTOR

PANKAJ BHANOT
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809

LATE
testimony

February 3, 2011

TO: The Honorable John M. Mizuno, Chair
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Patricia McManaman, Interim Director

SUBJECT: **H.B. 1480 - RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES**

Hearing: Thursday, February 3, 2011; 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of H.B. 1480 is to provide higher education scholarships to eligible former foster youth in lieu of higher education board allowances and to establish a higher education scholarship program within the Department of Human Services.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services does not understand the intent or goal of this bill. We cannot support the bill because it limits the benefits for youth who were formerly in foster care.

The Department's current higher education board allowance program is among the most liberal and "youth friendly" programs in the nation with reference to initial and continuing eligibility factors. Applying the most common scholarship program requirement, that youth maintain satisfactory or better grades, would make many of our initial applicants ineligible due to their poor high school grades.

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Continuing the academic achievement requirement would make many more students who achieve poor grades during their post secondary career ineligible.

The Department would suggest a broader conversation with other community members. Many colleges offer scholarships to youth to assist with tuition and other expenses. The possibility of receiving a college scholarship in addition to, rather than in lieu of the Department's higher education board allowance benefits, would provide a broader benefit package for youth formerly in foster care.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

My name is Alex J. Logan and I wish to submit testimony on House Bill # 1480. This bill proposes to replace the monthly board allowances for former foster youth with a scholarship program. As a former foster youth myself and a current professional in the field of human services I have several significant concerns associated with this bill.

- (1) The first concern is the time table associated with this scholarship program. In most scholarship programs a lump sum is awarded to the recipient. The current board allowance distributes funds directly to youth on a monthly basis and requires their participation in an Independent Living Program. If a scholarship program replaces the board allowance and a lump sum is awarded at the beginning of their higher education it is believed that youth will inappropriately expend the lump sum and will not be able to manage their finances well enough to pay for expenses on a regular basis. The current program of board allowances distributes monthly funds that automatically manage their funds more responsibly while learning about financial literacy through their respected Independent Living Program enabling a more fluid transition to adulthood.
- (2) The second concern is associated with the Independent Living Program. Currently youth are required to enroll into an Independent Living Program to obtain board allowances for higher education. If a scholarship program is initiated what is the future of the Independent Living Program and what is the incentive for youth to become involved with the program?
- (3) The third concern is with the additional programmatic design required of the Department of Human Services. The board allowance program has established criteria for rules and payments already. With the development of a scholarship program the department will need to design another program all together. Is this a needed measure, and furthermore is the department in a capable position to design another program?
- (4) The next concern is associated with academic performance and merit. Many foster youth that are still in the system struggle with educational challenges including those foster youth that are considered special needs. If the scholarship program becomes a program that is based on merit then many of the youth that are still in the system may not be eligible for the program due to a poor academic history.
- (5) Finally the language in the bill states that scholarships will be awarded based upon availability of funding. The board allowances are an extension of foster care payments in the amount of \$529.00 per month and are awarded directly to the former foster youth taking advantage of this beneficial program. If funding is compromised and becomes unavailable it is believed that significant consequence on the lives and success of these former foster youth would be inevitable.

Therefore as a former foster youth and a professional in the field of human services I recommend that this bill not be passed and the current board allowance program continue without modification to its design.

Alex J. Logan

(808) 430-5551

Jarvis Mina
94-979 Lumimoe St
96797 Waipahu, HI

Testimony of House Bill Number 1480

In opposition of changing Higher Education into a scholarship

Before the legislature

February 2, 2011

My name is Jarvis Mina, 19 years old and a former foster youth from Hawaii and aged out at the age of 18 in May of 2009. I am an active member in the foster youth community and I advocate, mentor and guide both current and former foster youth alike. Most relevantly, I am currently a recipient of Higher Education. I understand the legislature is interested in the best welfare of foster children in Hawaii. However, after reading over bill number 1480, I am against changing the structure of Higher Education in the interest of current and former foster, and in the interest of the state of Hawaii in the long term.

I find the bill unclear with many questions left to be answered. I would first like to ask what is the purpose in changing the way Higher Education board payments are made. My impression is that it is a ploy to cut back in funding by rejecting applicants., where you can read in Section 1 d, line 7-9 on page 2, **“The department’s standards relating to income resources of foster children shall be applicable to this section.”** I can assume that income may disqualify an otherwise perfectly eligible young adult to a funds that they are entitled to for pursuing a legitimate education from certified institutions. I also find the passage in the same section, letter e, **“Higher education scholarships shall be provided subject to the availability of the state and federal funds.”** This broadens the amount of participants that may be rejected, having it denied because of a restructure of an otherwise well standing system of Higher Education. If the next generation of adults are going to be running this world as we know it and rebuilding our economy, denying them what they were entitled to when facing the difficulties of being in foster care is unacceptable. We are investing \$6,348 a year in an education for these young adults, and cutting back on these investments for the sake of cutting back on funding will not accomplish positive result in the long run.

Having said my concerns with altered eligibility, my primary focus is to decipher and clarify Section 2, lines 16-18 of page 2; **“The department of human services shall cease accepting new application for higher education board allowances upon the effective date of this Act.”** This is left up for interpretation. One may say that the new program will be left handling the applications, but that is

not mentioned anywhere on Bill number 1480. I interpret it that new applicants will not be eligible for Higher Education at all and I would like to speak for all of the current foster youth that we are already at a disadvantage in terms with the rest of our peers in our society and having this fund taken away from us will push us back even further than we already are. We face issues of housing and jobs even more so than everyone else because of our age, job experience, and most likely have no family or friends to fall back on when the times are rough.

The bill mentions that there will be a new program established for the Higher Education scholarship within DHS. I am concerned with who will be staffed in this program because from my understanding, funds are lacking and people are being overworked. Having social workers run the program will not be an option because of their intense number caseloads and funding will be needed to staff this new program, funding that would otherwise be saved from cutting back on the number of Higher Education applicants.

I would like to thank the House Human Services Committee for taking time to read my testimony and I hope you realize that I will be one of the people who will be directly affected by this Act, along with many other former foster children statewide that depend on this fund to help pay for food, rent and tuition.

LATE Testimony

TO: Rep. John Mizuno, Chair
Rep. Jo Jordan, Vice Chair
Committee on Human Services

HEARING: Thursday, February 3, 2011, 9:00 am
Conference Room 329

FROM: Linda Santos
Family Programs Hawai'i

RE: HB 1480
Human Services; Higher Education Scholarship Program

I am the President and CEO for Family Programs Hawai'i (FPH). Mahalo for this opportunity to testify on House Bill 1480.

The State of Hawaii's Higher Education Board Allowance program is one of the most innovative and successful in the nation and should stand as is.

The Higher Education Board Allowance program, along with the Educational and Training Vouchers (ETV) program, a federally funded initiative under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, was established to help former foster youth complete their education/training goals and make a successful transition to self-sufficiency by providing additional financial support for post-secondary education and training. Scholarship programs are traditionally operated by foundations and schools. There are usually regulations that are not always appropriate to the needs of foster youth. While there are some scholarships currently available through private foundations for former foster youth attending higher education programs, additional scholarships as well as tuition waivers would be very helpful. However, these should complement the Higher Education Board Allowance rather than replace it.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on this important issue.

To: Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair, Representative Jo Jordan, Vice Chair and committee members

From: Cynthia White, M.Ed.

Re: Opposing HB1480 Relating to Human Services

Date: Thursday, February 3, 2011

Time: 9:00 AM

Place: Conference Room 329

**LATE
Testimony**

I oppose HB 1480 because it will negatively impact foster youth seeking a college education. This bill proposes to replace the monthly board allowances for former foster youth with a scholarship program. I have worked with the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition for ten years, assisting transitioning youth with college preparation and planning. The higher education monthly board allowance is essential to the academic success of former foster youth in that it provides stable assistance with expenses for their monthly needs. The Department of Human Services has been successfully administering the higher education payments and made major improvements that have increased successes for youth in higher education. Participation in the benefit requires that youth stay connected with an independent living program, engage in community service or be employed when on school breaks, and take responsibility for effectively managing a monthly budget. It is essentially a finely tuned mechanism that does not need changing. In fact, change would negatively impact the youth and the department requiring them to fix something that isn't broke. The current requirements are clear, making it easy for youth to help each other and efficient for workers. The department is already understaffed and overworked. It makes no sense to make unnecessary changes. It is unclear why this bill was introduced. I am confident that the committee recognizes the importance of higher education support for Hawaii's most disadvantaged youth and has their best interests in mind. That is why I urge you to vote no on bill HB1480.