

HB70, HD2

Measure Title: RELATING TO THE HOMELESS.

Report Title: Homeless; Return-to-home Program

Description: Establishes the Return-to-home Program to assist eligible homeless individuals to return to their home state if there is a support network available and the support network is able to receive them. Effective July 1, 2030. (HB70 HD2) (\$)

Companion:

Package: None

Current Referral: HMS, WAM

Introducer(s): CABANILLA



Help the Hawaii Homeless
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Committee on Human Services
Thursday, March 17, 2011, Room 16

RE: Testimony in Support of HB70, with amendments.

Aloha Chair Oakland, Vice Chair Ihara and members of the Committee on Human Services,

HB70, the return-to-home program, assists the homeless who have come to Hawaii from the Mainland, have a support system in their hometown, and would like to return, but do not have the funds. We have many on our Family Reunification Program wait list that do qualify for the the State's assistance should this bill pass. Those that do not will remain on our organization's wait list.

Help the Hawaii Homeless supports this bill with amendments. We believe that the sooner we are able to reunite a homeless neighbor with their families, the sooner they can begin to heal, be housed and find employment. Ideally, we would like to help before they have a chance to apply for TANF assistance in Hawaii and prevent the abuse of thereof when they leave; possibly having assistance from two States.

Unfortunately, this bill may, in fact, be an invitation to stay an entire year, amply supplied with food stamps and a ticket back home. Not including medical or cash benefits, we could spend \$314 per person in TANF (food stamp benefits) per month.

Currently, Help the Hawaii Homeless has 22 persons on our wait list. Most of them are receiving TANF benefits. Let's say 9 of them are on TANF for one year, that amounts to \$33,912 for our state. \$33,912 that our local families ARE NOT receiving because of these additional homeless that don't want to be here and want to go home. The **urgent and immediate support** of the State government is necessary.

In addition, some homeless are stranded tourists who are not prepared for the extreme expense of Hawaii or are the victims of crime. In Waikiki, there has been a report of an increase among homeless teens arriving in Hawaii. Some of them call us to find a way back home after discovering the harshness of living on our streets. We also receive referrals from the Waikiki Health Center, Visitor Aloha Society - Traveler's Aid, and numerous other agencies.

We've thought about many ideas to "safeguard" the government from a "free ticket" mentality. Our program does encourage our homeless neighbors to "earn" their way home by participating in fund raisers that earns funds towards their cause. This gives them an opportunity to do what they intended to do anyway and with dignity.

We would be happy to assist the State in reuniting the homeless with their families as soon as possible.

Mahalo nui loa,

Tisha Woytenko

Tisha Woytenko
President & Executive Director
Help the Hawaii Homeless



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Proposed Amendments to HB70

If the time limit of one year will not be removed, we propose this amendment:

WHEREAS a provision shall be made for stranded tourists that:

- 1) Become homeless as a result of crime and sudden lack of financial means to continue in Hawaii.;
- 2) Possess a round trip ticket.;
- 3) Have documented incident report by police and homeless agency.

Other proposed amendments:

WHEREAS all homeless individuals seeking to enter Return to Home Program sign an agreement that this is available to them only once and must be listed on their public assistance files at the State of Hawaii Department of Human Services.

Amend Section 2, part 5 to "The individual has been receiving social services and the receipt of such social services has been documented."

Amend Section 2, part d to "The department shall also assist program participants with necessary and proper preparations for the return trip, including proper identification, **public transportation to the airport (if available)**, orientation relating to airport security, the basics of personal **hygiene and sufficient physical and mental health to endure flight(s)**, and shall follow up with each individual within one month of the individual's return to the individual's home state to assess efforts at successful reunification with any family or support system."

Amend Section 4. To take effect immediately.

ChunOakland2 - Tyrell

From: rosebellam@aol.com
Sent: Wednesday, March 16, 2011 3:43 PM
To: HMS Testimony
Subject: Fwd: (no subject)

Senate Committee on Human Services
March 17, 2011
Thursday, March 17, 2011, Room016
Testimony in support
HB 70

Aloha Chair Chun-Oakland, ViceChair Ihara and members of the Human Services Committee,

HB70, the return-to-home program, assists homeless people who have come to Hawaii from the Mainland, have a support system in their hometown, and would like to return, but do not have the funds. Many of Hawaii's homeless are mainland transplants who came to Hawaii to escape the bitter cold, believing that once here, everything would be fine. Once here the harsh reality sets in and they now realize that there are family or friends back in their home-town, with whom they could stay.

By solidifying and funding this program, the state could save millions on homeless services. 38% of all public costs for those who are unsheltered are health care costs. A study of hospital admissions of homeless people in Hawaii revealed their rates for psychiatric hospitalization was over 100 times their non-homeless cohort. The average cost of a hospital stay in Hawaii is \$4,519 per day.

While it may seem extravagant, during the budget deficit, to request airfare for homeless people, I guarantee that this will account for a mere pittance of what that individual would cost if they remained homeless in Hawaii.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.

Rosebella Martinez
Ewa Beach