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LATE TESTIMONY

The House Committee on Education
Conference Room 309 at 2:00pm

Wednesday, March 16, 2011

To: Rep. Roy M. Takumi, Chair
Rep. Della Au Belatti, Vice Chair

From: Teresa Chao Ocampo

Re: SB 1503 SD2, RELATING TO EDUCATION

Testimony: In OPPOSITION of SB1503 SD2, Related to Education

I am opposed to SB 1503 SD2 because this bill openly discriminates against a handful of PRIVATELY owned or operated, nonpublic special education schools or programs that are not accredited by the specified affiliations listed in SB 1503 SD2.

There is no guarantee or assurance of programs that ARE currently accredited by the various affiliations identified in SB 1502 SD2 are better able to provide a Free Appropriate Public Education than those schools that are not accredited by those identified in this bill. The needs of a disabled child is wholly dependent upon what and how a school can serve those needs rather than on the mere accreditation of the school.

The DOE has targeted a couple of these privately-owned programs for decades. This is a known fact among the DOE administration, community providers, agencies, parents and possibly legislators.

It is shameful that the legislature is a willing participant in the DOE's charades with the outside appearances of supporting the students with disabilities via SB 1503 SD2. The privately owned programs that are targeted in this bill have been deemed appropriate private placements by Hearings Officers many times over the years and the DOE has tried unsuccessfully to close these schools down for as long as these schools have been in existence.

For some severely disabled students in Hawaii, these placements serve their unique and individualized learning needs as required by IDEA. These day schools offer a placement that the DOE cannot offer. In some cases these schools serve as a good alternative for those students who would otherwise be placed in an institution on the mainland which would cost the DOE far more than any day school. Other schools provide a small, nurturing and unthreatening environment that allows the disabled students to actually participate in a school environment without having to deal with extremes ranging from chaos as experienced with the larger DOE special education classrooms to the "baby-sitting" types of environments within other DOE special education classrooms.

Perhaps a better alternative would be to have the DOE and these privately owned schools work collaboratively with the welfare of the disabled students in mind rather than with an on-going adversarial stance. Only then can an overall cooperative solution be potentially achieved.

I urge this Committee to not pass this bill as written for it is discriminatory and further limits the educational placements available to a small group of children whose unique learning needs are served by these private placements.

Sincerely,

(signature on file)

Teresa Chao Ocampo