

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

FROM: Cynthia Curatalo, CEO
Marvin St. Clair, Clinical Director
James Stout, Director of Foster Care Programs
Hawaii Behavioral Health

BRIEFING: Friday, November 5, 2010
1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309

Aloha,

Hawaii Behavioral Health has been providing therapeutic foster care programs across the state for over ten years. Our experience has pointed to some salient issues related to successful transitions to adulthood from the foster care system.

We have found that despite the presence of available fiscal resources, money in the absence of social connections that are meaningful and supportive will result in painful isolation. This isolation along with multiple other stress factors that young adults face in our community can be crippling.

We recommend the building of long lasting relationships while in the foster care system. In our experience our successful youth still have and want contact with their former foster parents or with meaningful adult figures. The relationships that were forged while in foster care have become life long connections. Ohana is the root of our social fabric in Hawaii. Children/young adults without ohana or attachments to meaningful adult figures are at great risk.

When at risk, youth need a good and appropriate access to mental health services. Mental health resources to young people are not readily available once they exit the state system of child and adolescent mental health. There is often an expectation that a young adult will independently access outpatient services if needed through medical insurance. This does not address the reality.

We propose the creation of a "home" base, a place/center on every island that would be primarily for former foster youth of any age to support and sustain the on-going developmental growth of maturing in our community. We further support the elimination of the concept of "aging out" and the discontinuation of the assumption that identification of meager services to address the needs of some address the needs of the whole. We envision this center to be a warm, inviting and comfortable place where meaningful relationships can continue or

be created, where mental health services and/or resources addressing life skills can be easily accessed, where former foster youth can both be supported with resources at the same time of giving to others as mentors.

We commend and support the efforts of many groups addressing the issues facing former foster youth transitioning to adulthood and in the building of realistic solutions. We particularly support the Foster Youth Coalition for their unique understanding of what is truly needed “to make it” after foster care. We join together in the commitment and dedication to the belief that our foster youth are incredibly strong, resilient and talented young people who can and will succeed in becoming good, healthy and contributing adults within our state.

Thank you for the opportunity of submitting this testimony.