

March 21, 2011

LATE TESTIMONY

Re: SB 289 (Families for R.E.A.L.)

Dear House Education Committee Members

Chair Takumi, Vice-Chair Belatti, Aquino, Awana, Chang, Hanohano, Mizuno, Nakashima, Saiki, Takai, Wooley, Fontaine, Johanson:

My name is Laura McHugh and I am the site coordinator and parent educator for the DOE Leeward Families for R.E.A.L. (Resources and Early Access to Learning) program at Pearl City Highlands Elementary School. I am here to ask for your support of SB 289, a bill that would provide biennial funding for Families for R.E.A.L. (FFR).

FFR has been operating since 1988 and its mission is to support parents in their role as their child's first teacher. Although the majority of our participants are typical parents and *there are no restrictions to attend*, FFR also serves families who are referrals from agencies such as 0-3 (DOH Early Intervention Section), Easter Seals, Family Court, and CPS. There are currently two FFR sites (down from 5 sites just 3 years ago), Leeward and Windward, and each site serves approximately 300 families every school year with at least that many more families on a waitlist.

Research shows that 90% of brain development occurs within the first 5 years of life. FFR is a very important parent-child interaction program that provides practical and useful information necessary to build healthy families. Our goal is to get parents to be more involved in their child's education by giving them the tools they need such as information on child development, and share ideas for activities and other ways they can help their child in the critical early years of development.

FFR is a vital program that provides school-based curriculum for parents and their children birth to 5 years of age. The Department of Education (DOE) believes that FFR does not "directly service" the children of Hawaii; therefore, it has cut funding for this very important curriculum-based program. This decision jeopardizes the opportunities that will provide for the healthy development of Hawaii's keiki and help them be "school ready" when they enter kindergarten. For that reason, I humbly ask for your support to continue funding FFR.

Sincerely,

Laura McHugh

Leeward Families for R.E.A.L. Site Coordinator, Parent Educator

SB 289
3/21/11
RM. 309
2:00 PM

LATE TESTIMONY

Dear Legislators,

I am the Site Coordinator for the Benjamin Parker Families for R.E.A.L. program and would like to take this opportunity to share some information about the program.

Families for R.E.A.L. provides learning experiences for families and their children, from birth-5 years, with the goal of promoting education and making each child's first experience in the classroom a positive one. We are the link between families with young children and the school environment by bringing parents onto school campuses and providing them with the opportunity to become involved in their child's education at the earliest age possible. We have seen a direct correlation between parents who have attended our program and the level of their involvement once their children enter school.

Data from last year showed that approximately 270 families and their children attended our program. There was a diverse range of families that we serviced. For example, 11 % were grandparents, 13%-fathers, 13%-members of the military, 23% had an income under \$38,000, 22% of the children were receiving other services and 33% of the children were part Hawaiian. At the end of last school year, we had approximately 360 families on our wait list.

This data represents only the Windward site and not the Leeward site.

Emphasis should be placed on Early Childhood Education, the formative years, yet this program lost its DOE funding last year. I believe we need to invest our time and money to ensure that all young children have the opportunity to learn and succeed.

By being proactive we can provide parents with information and resources about child development and school readiness. We also provide their children with experiences that will enhance their development and learning. If we can offer this to families, more children will enter kindergarten developmentally ready to learn. This will lead to long-term school & life success.

The only way for Families for R.E.A.L to continue serving parents and their children, as we have done for the past 20 plus years, is for the legislature to pass SB289.

We ask you to consider our request, keeping in mind the future of our children and the future of Hawaii.

Sincerely,

Chris Chang