

COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Honorable Senator David Y. Ige, Chair
Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Other Honorable Committee Members

Thursday, February 21, 2013
9:00 a.m.
Conference Room 211

STRONG SUPPORT – SB 1139, SD1– RELATING TO THE HAWAI’I HOME VISITING PROGRAM

Please vote yes to pass this measure to provide home visitors for at risk babies and families in our community, which can help keep people healthy and safe, preventing immeasurable and unsustainable social and economic problems.

The program can help prevent social and economical costs by keeping children safe by helping their parents provide healthy homes.

My civil litigation work as a former deputy attorney general in the 1990s included defending the department of public safety (PSD). In preparation for depositions and trials I read countless files of imprisoned people who were witnesses. In reading the files, I was stunned that a large percent of the incarcerated people were formerly foster children. Also around this time, Kim Thorburn, MD, who was PSD medial director at the time, discussed a survey she did of incarcerated men finding that well over 80% of them reported being sexually abused as children. It is well known now too that most imprisoned women were sexually abused.

As a health educator and restorative lawyer today helping people deal with the effects of crime and criminal behavior, everyday I see the tragedy of how a lack of resources, substance abuse, crime, and prison harms children and families for generations, e.g., in a prison program we are currently providing, two incarcerated women out of a total of about 50, have families that we worked with previously in a family court program only a few years ago.

We spend vast amounts punishing people for bad decisions concerning substance abuse, which rarely improves behavior,¹ or helps people heal, and instead often works to destroy families and put children at further risk. My experiences as a guardian ad litem, and as a lawyer in child abuse and neglect cases after I left the AGs, also supports my belief in supporting prevention measures like the home visitor program.

Finally, as a former at-risk teen parent and the mother of a baby girl when I was 18, who was helped by a home visitor as this bill envisions, I can attest to the program’s value. Despite what I lacked, including education as a 15 year old high school drop out who was briefly incarcerated at age 16, I became a Montessori teacher, and by age 31 was a lawyer, thanks in part to the help our home visitor provided us, which I remain deeply grateful for today.

Please support this program to help at risk families find meaningful lives with the support of home visitors. It is a program that will easily benefit our community in the long run. For more details about my background and work including over 40 published papers and two books see www.lorennwalker.com.

Thank you for your time and efforts serving the public.

¹ (see: National Institute of Justice 12-19-12 presentation on first circuit court’s HOPE program and ramifications of our current justice system failure to decrease recidivism with prolonged incarceration) <http://nij.gov/multimedia/presenter/presenter-kleiman-hawken/data/resources/presenter-kleiman-hawken-transcript.htm>
