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Thursday, March 28, 2013

Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair
Rep. Scott Y. Nishimoto, Vice Chair
Rep. Aaron Ling Johanson, Vice Chair

Conference Room 308
Hawaii State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

**RE: Support of SB 1340, SD2, HD2 (HSCR1206) Relating to Foster Care
Hearing Scheduled Thursday, March 28, 2013 at 2:00 PM**

To the Members of the House Committee on Finance:

I write today in strong support of SB 1340 that would, in part, establish the young adult voluntary foster care program to care for and supervise eligible foster youth until age twenty-one.

Growing up I have always believed the saying “it takes a village to raise a child.” Today the story seems to have changed to “if it’s not my child, it’s not my problem.” We have forgotten that *all* children are *our* children. It is our collective responsibility to ensure they have the resources, support, services and encouragement they need to succeed.

I was fortunate to have the support of my mother and mentors—adults who cared and were committed to my development. That support did not cut off when I turned eighteen. In fact, twelve years later I still receive support, encouragement, and advice from mentors who are now life-long friends. Many foster youth are not so fortunate. Upon aging out of the system, if they do not have a care provider who will voluntarily assume the role past eighteen, the youth are left to “sink or swim”—navigate the responsibilities of adulthood with no introduction or guidance.

We can make a difference to ensure foster children, our children, receive the tools, skills, encouragement and support they need before they become eighteen and make certain they have a stable foundation to successfully transition into adulthood and independence. We want to make certain they not only survive, but *thrive*. We can do this by supporting SB 1340 to extend foster care to twenty one. To make it even stronger—I would encourage amending SB 1340 to extend the age to twenty-five.

For the reasons set forth above, I strongly support SB 1340 and pray committee members support this bill as well to ensure it passes. Please do what is in the best interest of the youth of today who are our futures of tomorrow. Thank you for the opportunity to submit my comments. Your consideration is greatly appreciated.

Respectfully,

/s/ Serena L. Podish