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February 19, 2013

Testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 1340

Voluntary Foster Care to 21

I am Laurie Arial Tochiki and I have the honor and privilege to serve as President and CEO of EPIC, `Ohana. Since 1997, EPIC `Ohana has been a non-profit partner to the Department of Human Services providing `Ohana Conferencing and Family Finding to the families in the child welfare system throughout the state of Hawai`i. Since 2004 we have also provided Youth Circles for transitioning youth. In a Youth Circle we work with a foster youth transitioning to adulthood to help them develop and execute a plan for their future. We help youth connect to the resources they need to make a successful transition. But we know that even with the transition plan in place, foster youth are not ready to be independent at 18. Actually very few children are ready for independent at 18 – even those children who have intact families and have not faced the issues and challenges of being a foster child.

The foster youth in Hawai`i are OUR children, and deserve the love and support that we give the children in our own biological families. It is our duty, but it is also a very good investment for the future. It is the goal of the child welfare service and family court to find permanent homes and connections for children who cannot be reunified with their parents. Even though this is the goal, each year more than 100 children “age out” of the system without permanent family and connections. This bill gives the state the tools it needs to help young people develop better paths to adulthood. It gives the state tools that will help develop the network of support young people in foster care need in order to succeed. It is an investment to minimize the homelessness, premature parenthood, poor educational outcomes, and criminal justice involvement that we know this population experiences without support.

This is not just a wild guess that with the support we may be able to avert the negative outcomes these youth experience. There is formidable research about the adolescent brain and development that tells us that youth are still developing and maturing during this time



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frame. Positive supports during this time can help to alleviate some of the harmful consequences of early trauma. Also, the Jim Casey Initiative, the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the federal Children's Bureau and many other agencies have demonstrated best practices in services that improve outcomes for youth. The Department of Human Services has made tremendous strides to work with families, protect children and improve outcomes. I believe that the DHS, with the strong community partnerships it has built, is ready to extend care to foster youth, and do it right.

Thank you so much for your attention to this important measure.

Aloha

Laurie Arial Tochiki



LATE



FAMILY PROGRAMS HAWAI'I

TO: Senator David Y. Ige, Chair
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair
Committee on Ways and Means

HEARING: Wednesday, February 20, 2013
9:45 am
Conference Room 211

FROM: Linda Santos
Family Programs Hawai'i

RE: SB 1340 - Related to the Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care Act

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Family Programs Hawai'i specializes in services related to the child welfare system. Assisting youth successfully emancipate from foster care is one of our most important program emphasis. We operate 5 different programs working with this population. These programs are located on Oahu and in East Hawaii and are funded primarily by foundations grants or contracts. They were developed because of our concern for the poor outcomes we have seen for emancipating youth.

In the last 10 + years, the Federal Government, as well as the State of Hawaii, has recognized that youth in foster care need additional benefits and services since they are most often without resources when they become 18. New laws have been passed to assist them. The Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care Act provides states with the opportunity to improve the outcomes of these youth. Other states that have already enacted have reported success.

We strongly support this bill to set the requirements needed to extend the foster care to 21.

LATE

Adina M. Murakami, C.S.A.C.
1759 A Skyline Dr., Honolulu, HI 96817
adinam@hawaii.edu

February 13th, 2013

To: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chairperson
Senator Josh Green, Vice-Chairperson
And members of the Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Adina M. Murakami, C.S.A.C.

RE: SB1340, Relating to Foster Care – SUPPORT

Chair, Vice-Chair, and members of the Senate/House Committee on Human Services, I am testifying in **strong support** of SB1340

Aloha, as a substance abuse counselor I have had the opportunity to service many agencies and work with a wide variety of constituents over the last two decades. In that capacity I have had the privilege to work with youth involved in “the system”. I am currently enrolled in the Bachelors or Arts Social Work program at the University of Hawai`i at Mānoa.

- While employed at the Marimed Foundation in Kāne‘ohe, encountered several young men in the foster care system. However, the terms of their “stay within the system” were not congruent with the terms of their probation. The foster care system released them upon their 18th birthrate, while the terms of their probation bound them to the state until they “age out at the age of 19”.
- While volunteering at Youth Outreach one of Hale Kipa’s programs. I found that the highest population at risk for premature death was youth between the ages of 13 and 25. One of the workers there shared the following statistic with me: “if youth these youth can live to the age of 25 most of them will die of natural causes in their old age”.
- In Psychology 100 we discovered that the frontal lobes continued development until the age of 24. This is the section of the brain organizes tasks, and helps to set priorities. This fact made sense to me, no wonder some youth appear so scattered and after 26 or so they mellow out. It seems to me that we could make a huge impact if we could find a way to support youth until the age of 25 and give their bodies a chance to live long enough for their brain to fully develop.

I currently have no suggested revisions to this bill as it stands.

Restate your position strongly support former foster care youths who are attending an institution of higher education as a full-time student, to stay in the foster care system until the age of 23.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Adina M. Murakami, C.S.A.C.

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013

9:45am, Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Apuauro Turano, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**

Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of House Bill SB 1340, Relating Foster Care**

Aloha my name is Apuauro Turano and I am 22 years old. I am a new member of the Oahu HI H.O.P.E.S youth leadership board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. I am submitting my testimony in support of extending Hawaii's foster care from the age of 18 to 21. I believe if Hawaii's foster youth are given the opportunity for voluntary extended care, they would be more successful in transitioning into adulthood.

At age 11, I lost my father to cancer and I ran away from my mother's because the living arrangements were not safe. I ran away to a friend's house, whose family became my first foster home. However, I felt I wasn't getting the proper treatment. I wasn't provided with enough clothes and items I needed for football. I was treated like an outsider. I met another friend who told his family about me and asked if they could take me in. I asked my social worker if I could go with my friend's family and that request changed my life. In my sophomore year of high school, I was taken in by my friend's grandparents and they became like my own grandparents. They showed me love and gave me the guidance I needed as a teenager. They taught me responsibility which helped me graduate from high school and join the Hawaii Air National Guard. Even though I aged out of foster care at age 18, my grandparents are still an active role in my life now at the age of 22.

I learned a lot while I was a part of the foster care system, both good and bad. I understand that other youth who experience foster care face difficult challenges and are not fortunate enough to have a family to love and help them as they become young adults. They, in turn, suffer from poor outcomes, like homelessness and unemployment. If optional foster care is extended to 21, more young people will have opportunities and hope for a better future. I humbly ask that you pass Senate Bill 1340. Thank you.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Room 211, State Capitol
From: **Arleen Kuwamura**, Hale 'Opio Kauai

Re: **Testimony in Support of House Bill SB 1340, Relating Foster Care**

My name is Arleen Kuwamura and I work for Hale 'Opio Kaua'i. I am the partner staff Kaua'i branch of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340 which supports extended jurisdiction for foster youth beyond age 18. I support the intent of this bill to have voluntary foster care extended up to age 21.

For some of those who have aged out of the system, they are often not ready to go out on their own or they lack the support and often times the necessary skills needed to be successful adults. I have worked with foster youth for 18 years and have watched many of these youth struggle to make it on their own, many of them have very little or no support when they age out of foster care. If we could extend care during this crucial time of growth when they need services most, I believe we will not only be supporting the individual young person increase their full potential and social capital it will also strengthen the communities they live, work and go to school in.

In Hawai'i, 33% of former foster youth in a recent poll, ages 18 to 23, reported having couch-surfed or moved from home to home because they did not have a place to stay. That is more than the national average of 24% of former foster youth who experience some form of homelessness by age 24.

I want to emphasize that I feel this is an important **option** for youth, and that they should have the choice to remain in foster care beyond 18, as long as they are willing and eligible.

In closing, I would ask this committee to support the intent of and pass Senate Bill 1340.

Thank you very much.

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Ashley Slater, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (West Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Ashley Slater and I am the President of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative in West Hawai'i. I am for the Senate Bill 1340 Extension of Foster Care to age 21 in the State of Hawai'i. There are many reasons that I think this Bill should be passed.

One of my reasons is that I feel with this extension, foster youth have more time to grow and learn what they need to, to survive in the real world. I also feel that it gives them a little extra time to connect with that foster family and to safe and comfortable to contact them when exiting out. I feel that every foster youth deserves some one they can fall back on for help and support. Granting this bill allows the foster youth the time they need to build supportive relationships. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Chardonnay Rosa-Arango, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Chardonnay Rosa-Arango and I am the President of the Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit testimony in support of SB 1340 and its intent to provide the option of voluntary foster care up to age 21.

I am very fortunate to say that at the age of 16 my foster parents at the time took legal guardianship of me. They not only provided me with security but they assured me that I had a family I could always be a part of. Because I was given a stable home past the age of 18, I was able to transition into adulthood very efficiently. Knowing that I had support and stability in my life, I was able to live out my dream and go to Southwestern Assemblies of God University, a private Christian university, in Waxahachie, Texas. I attended school there for a year and a half and now, at the age of 19, I am at Kauai Community College living with my former foster parents. If I had been completely cut off at 18, I know that the choices I made would have been very different. I believe that if foster care is extended up to 21, many foster youth will be given the opportunity and support in order to transition into adulthood more efficiently.

Statistics show that former foster youth will experience some form of homelessness due to the fact that they don't have a place to stay after they age out of care and don't have supportive adult relationships. In closing, I would ask this committee to pass SB1340 and give foster youth the option to receive the continued support they need as they make the critical transition into adulthood. Thank you very much.





LATE

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President / CEO

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol
From: **Delia Ulima, Statewide Initiative Coordinator**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative, EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Re: **In Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

Aloha! My name is Delia Ulima and I am a Statewide Initiative Coordinator for the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative. We are the local site for the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and EPIC 'Ohana is the lead agency for this Initiative in Hawai'i. The Initiative works with systems, such as the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare, other service providers and partners within the public and private sector to create opportunities and support transitioning foster youth to successfully move into adulthood and become a contributing part of our community.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340, which provides young people with the voluntary option to remain in a developmentally appropriate foster care program up to age 21.

The State of Hawaii is the "parent" of young people who are in permanent foster care custody. As "wards" of the State, they are in a unique legal class. For those who exit out of this system at age 18, they often find themselves without the necessary supports that any 18-year old would need to survive, let alone thrive. Nationally, outcomes for transitioning foster youth are grim. By the time they are 24, one in four will experience homelessness, 77% of young women will become pregnant, only 3% will obtain a four year college degree, earn significantly less than their peers and 81% of males will be arrested. A Chapin Hall Study showed that the extension of foster care to 21 resulted in the following benefits: increased college attendance, increased earnings, decreased unintended pregnancies, decreased usage of public assistance, decreased homelessness and decreased incarceration.

States currently have the option to extend eligibility across certain Title IV-E programs. Under the 2008 Federal Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act, federal funds may be drawn down to support the extension of foster care when certain employment and education requirements are met. Currently, there are over 13 states that have opted to extend foster care beyond age 18.

In closing, I would ask this committee to consider what kind of future we would like these young people to look forward to. Think about what our own families provided for us in our very young adulthood? What do we expect to provide for our own biological children? Most in this room would find it unrealistic to expect our own 18 year old children to be completely financially, physically, mentally and emotionally on their own with no parental guidance, no financial supports for a first car, first apartment, support with college, spending money, medical coverage and basic love and encouragement. Providing an option for young people in our foster care system to have additional supports beyond 18 makes ethical and in the long run, financial, sense. We respectfully ask this committee to pass Senate Bill 1340. Mahalo nui loa.

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013

9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Filipe Tauaika, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**

Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

Good afternoon, members of the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Filipe Tauaika, I am 20 years old and a member of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board on Oahu.

I support SB 1340 to provide foster youth with voluntary foster care to age 21. I was in foster care at a young age and aged out of the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facilities (Ko'olau) at the age of 18. I didn't have a plan for where I would live or what I would do. Fortunately, I found relatives and they helped me with housing, a job and guidance. I was also lucky I found something that I loved to do, boxing. It kept me out of trouble and gave me a goal to work towards, which is to be an Olympic boxer. With the support of my family, coach and others in the community and church, I was able to find resources and stay on track.

Unfortunately, many other young people aging out of foster care don't have the same chances. They don't have knowledge about medical coverage, housing, employment, resources and other basic necessities they need to be a successful adult. If they had these supports and resources, they would have better opportunities for a better life.

I humbly ask that you pass SB 1340. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013

9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Gernani Yutob Jr., HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**

Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Gernani Yutob, Jr. and I am the President of the O`ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. The Initiative is a national and local effort to create and support successful outcomes for transitioning foster youth.

I aged out of the foster care system in 2008 at the age of 18 and will be turning 23 in April. I will be graduating with my Bachelor of Arts in Public Administration degree with Academic Distinction at the University of Hawai`i – West O`ahu in May. Did you know, only 3 percent of foster youth who age out of the foster care system at 18 will graduate with a four-year degree by the age of 25 compared to about 20 percent from the general population? I was very fortunate to have my resource caregiver take me under her wing after I graduated from high school. This meant that I had a place to stay and was able to fully concentrate on school and work without worrying about where I will spend my next night at. Had this not happened, I would be a 23 year old who would most likely not be graduating on time because my main priority would be to survive and figure out where I will get my next meal. Not a lot of foster youth who age out of care will have a supportive adult and the resources they need to guide them through one of the most difficult phases in life. Did you kick your child out of your home when they turned 18 without offering any type of support or guidance and expect them to make it out on their own? Even at the age of 18, when they are legally considered an adult, they are not ready for what lies ahead just yet. It is imperative that we have support and resources for youth transitioning out of care to become successful adults in the future.

In closing, I would like to humbly ask this committee to pass SB 1340 and give foster youth to receive the continued support they need as they make the critical transition to adulthood. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013

9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Judy Adviento, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**

Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Judy Adviento, I am 21 years old and I am the Secretary of the Oahu HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit this testimony in support of SB 1340 and its intent to provide the option to participate in voluntary foster care up to age 21.

Some foster youth are not prepared to go out on their own when they turn 18. There are so many negative statistics about youth who age out of care. For example, in a study of young people formerly in foster care, 24% have experienced homelessness at least once, and 81% of the males get arrested in comparison to 17% of their peers in the general population.

I went into foster care at the age of 16. Even before I went into care, I was quite independent. I worked and a lot of my paperwork by myself so when I went into foster care, I was ready to take on those obstacles. It also helped that I had a lot of supportive people around me. When I turned 18, I felt prepared but not every youth is as prepared as I was and it's expressed through the statistics.

I am currently my younger brother's resource caregiver (foster parent) and it would terrify me if I found out that my brother "fell through the cracks" because he was not ready to go on his own at the age of 18. Every youth matures at different rates. This is even true with our peers in the general population. The difference is that foster youth sometimes don't know/have anywhere and anyone to go to when they are in trouble and struggling financially, emotionally, physically, etc.

I want to emphasize that I feel this is an important option for youth, and they should have the choice to remain in foster care beyond 18, as long as they are willing and eligible. In closing, I ask this committee to pass SB 1340. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Karen Hagopian, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (West Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Karen Hagopian, and I am 19 years old. I am the Vice-President of the West Hawaii HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board. I support SB 1340 to the fullest extent. By extending foster care to the age of 21, it gives the foster youth a better chance to get a support system such as building a family relationship, obtaining knowledge of schooling, having a housing system in place, and being able to balance school and work without having to fret about where they are going to sleep that night.

For me when I aged out of foster care at 18, it was hard to focus on school and work because I knew that I would have to move out of my foster home and find a place to live. Because of that my grades slipped in college and I had to focus more on work. This is why I think extending foster care to 21 is important. I humbly ask that you pass SB 1340. Thank you.





TO: Ways and Means Committee, Rm 211

HEARING: Wednesday, February 20, 2013

FROM: MARILYN YAMAMOTO

RE: SB1340 - RELATING TO THE YOUNG ADULT VOLUNTARY FOSTER CARE ACT.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I strongly support the bill.

The Administration for Children and Families clearly states that child removal is a traumatic event, even when the parents are unfit to care for them. That report states that these children are given psychotropic drugs at the rate of 3 times the number of children in family care. The news media in 2 states has recently reported that a staggering 30% of foster children were found to have been homeless, involved in prostitution and incarcerated after aging out of foster care. Regardless of the quality of foster care, child removal is a serious risk to a child's long-term prognosis for stability and emotional health. Voluntary participation in services until age 21 is a positive step for foster teens who can take advantage of the additional services.

I would like to address the valid concerns of previous testifiers that foster teens who age out prior to having achieved stable permanency have a poor prognosis for success as an adult. Following are suggestions to minimize the impact by **reducing out-of-home placement at the outset**.

1. I believe that making "reasonable efforts" to keep children in homes where there is no imminent danger from abuse or neglect could be greatly improved and streamlined, thereby avoiding the necessity of child removal to foster care and the associated costs of that care.
 - a. I have the information reported to the federal government, that less than 10 of every 100 children in foster care have no other alternative but out-of-home care due to the seriousness of a parent offense of abuse and neglect. In those cases, a police officer is the most likely to take the first call and makes the removal decision. Many others included in the remaining 90% could reasonably be left in their own homes with services to the family. (See National Coalition for Child Protection Reform research at NCCPR.org)
 - b. I have information and belief that children are too often removed from their homes based upon the "err on the side of the child" philosophy and not on factual evidence. That mindset is flawed in that child removal creates a lifetime trauma for the very children the agency seeks to protect, making the agency part of the problem. I would suggest that "to err on the side of family preservation" should replace that philosophy with the knowledge that credible statistics say that "child welfare workers are between 2 and 6 times more likely to wrongly label an innocent family guilty of child abuse".

- c. I believe that too much latitude to make removal decisions is placed in the hands of a few child welfare workers without comprehensive training, rather than a wider perspective of professional opinion. A CWS caseworker should be required to document, via photos and recordings, the assessment of at least 2 other professionals to include a police officer and/or medical/mental health professional before taking any steps to obtain a removal order in a non-emergency report. Since child neglect is the highest percentage of child welfare cases, I would suggest that clear and convincing evidence be present on the record. I would suggest that imminent danger be properly defined, as imminent means “now”, not within 90 days, per Hawaii Statute.
 - e. I have information that States may apply for a waiver of the Title-IV foster care funding to divert those funds to family preservation/in-home services. Although applying for a waiver will give more flexibility in spending, there needs to still be a plan in place so that the contracted services are more cost efficient.
 - f. A February 2013 article from Kern County, California states that, in the aftermath of a parent lawsuit for wrongful removal, the number of foster children has been reduced from 800 in 2011 to 400 in 2012, simply because child protective services implemented a mandate to demand a warrant for child removal. That requirement was always in place. Is Hawaii CWS in compliance with the 4th Amendment and state law that requires a warrant to enter a home for search and seizure?
2. **Case Planning** for parents whose children are in foster care has some flaws that unnecessarily prolong the time that children are in out-of-home care, thereby increasing the cost to the government.
- a. Every parent who is involved with a CWS case appears to have been assigned a cookie-cutter service plan in order to reunite with a child. I am suggesting that taking the time to assess cases individually will pare down services to only those needed. Is it reasonable to order a parent into couples counseling when there’s a restraining order in place and the victim parent has left the abuser? Is it OK to order a 5 month parenting class when a parent has been accused of neglect due to failure to pay an electric bill? Payment of the electric bill and enrollment in a budgeting class would have cost less than one month’s foster care bill. Unnecessary service plan requirements prolong a child’s out-of-home stay and can drag a case on for literally years when review hearings are held only once every six months.
 - b. Caseplanning is described in the parent handbook and federal guidelines as a joint effort between caseworkers and parents. Hawaii CFSR and State assessment reports indicate that parents feel this does not happen often. Planning is done by the agency, and handed to the parents without any input from the parents.
 - c. When a case plan is devised, referrals to contract providers should be issued within 5 days to expedite correction of the issues that need to be addressed. When all services have been completed, a court hearing needs to be scheduled immediately to close the case and return the children to the family.
 - d. When families with CWS cases are handled with a one-size fits all criteria, caseworkers procrastinate on case progress, foster care costs remain steady and prolonged and the children suffer needless harm due to separation from their family. This causes a backlog in needed services,

and an inflated demand, causing a high cost.

3. False allegations via the child abuse hotline cost wasted man hours in investigation with no productive results.
 - a. More than twice the number of calls received in Hawaii are unsubstantiated for abuse and neglect. The hotline is well-known to be an avenue for harassment by vindictive parties.
 - b. The child abuse hotline should eliminate the anonymous reporting and substitute confidential reporting. All reporters should be required to give their names with the understanding that if the report is found to be deliberately false, the victim family will be notified and the agency will pursue prosecution. The voice message on the hotline should include a warning that knowingly false allegations will have consequences, and repayment will be sought.

Implementation of the suggestions for reasonable efforts, case planning and the child abuse hotline would cut costs that could be diverted to an increase in the foster care payments while at the same time reduce the number of "resource families" needed to care for Hawaii's keikis. **Those children who have NO OTHER CHOICE but to live in foster care should have the option of extended services until the age of 21.**

The National Coalition for Child Protection Reform has, for over 20 years, researched the aspects of the child welfare system and has published credible evidence that foster placement should be a last resort only solution to families with child care challenges. See NCCPR.org and its reports on favorable outcomes as a result of leaving children at home with services.

I SUPPORT THIS BILL TO PROVIDE VOLUNTARY SERVICES UNTIL THE AGE OF TWENTY-ONE, BUT WITH THE UNDERSTANDING THAT THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE IS INFLATED DUE TO UNNECESSARY CHILD REMOVAL.

Sincerely,

Marilyn Yamamoto

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Keola Limkin, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (East Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Keola Limkin, I am 22 years old and I was born and raised on the Big Island of Hawaii. I am the Secretary for the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board in East Hawaii. During most of my childhood I lived with my mother and my five younger siblings. When I was a sophomore in high school, my siblings and I were placed in foster care until I aged out of child welfare services.

My younger siblings frequently moved between foster homes until my mother regained legal custody of them. I was fortunate to remain with the same foster parent during my entire experience. I developed a strong relationship with my foster dad to the point where I felt permanence. Immediately after graduating from high school, I lived at the University of Hawaii at Hilo dormitory while attending school. Our bond did not wither and he allowed me to live with him during summer break.

I support SB 1340 regarding Voluntary Foster Care Act to extend care to 21 in Hawaii. I believe that allowing foster youth to have an option to remain in foster care up until the age of 21 would nurture positive community members. The age group of 18-21 years is a window where healthy risk taking can take place. These young adults will face many new experiences and a foster parent could provide both support and counseling. Foster parents should also be trained to parent these young adults in this specialized period if policy is to change. Foster parent guidance during this critical period for learning will ensure that they succeed in their future endeavors. Please pass SB 1340.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Michael Masulit, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My Name is Michael Jay Masulit and I am a Member of the Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340 which supports voluntary foster care up to age 21 in Hawaii.

For those who age out of the system, they are often not ready to go out on their own because of the lack of support that they need to be a successful adult. I've seen many of my fellow board members who aged out of foster care deal with a lot in their lives. Many of them had very little or no support. I am one of the fortunate ones. When I aged out of foster care, I was able to complete a college degree in culinary arts with the help of an aunt. If it wasn't for this one caring adult who provided housing and college support, I don't know where I would be today.

I want to emphasize that I feel this is an important option for youth, and they should have the choice to remain in foster beyond 18, as long as they want to and are willing to meet the requirements of the program.

In closing, I would ask this committee to pass SB 1340. Thank you.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Nadia Troche, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Nadia Troche and I am the Vice-President of the Kaua'i HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit testimony in support of SB 1340 and its intent to provide the option of voluntary foster care up to age 21.

At age 15, my brother and I entered foster care without any knowledge of the system. It was a traumatic experience. Fortunately my brother had me to fall upon when things went wrong, therefore I can say I grew up at a very early age. But, without me he wouldn't have had that responsible adult to nurture him during his transitioning stage, he wouldn't have had any financial help to get himself anywhere in life, he wouldn't have had a place to stay once he aged out, and those are all problems that other youth face alone. I can strongly say that foster care should be extended past the age of 18, and of course there are many reasons why, but my main reason is we deserve to be loved and nurtured like any other child. We deserve to have that strong back bone to fall upon in time of need, we are children of the community that want to be the best we can be. To have that stable home, those stable foster parents, a stable living would really change lives, a lot of lives!

Statistics show that former foster youth will experience some form of homelessness due to the fact that they don't have a place to stay after they age out of care and don't have supportive adult relationships. In closing, I would ask this committee to pass SB 1340 and give foster youth the option to receive the continued support they need as they make the critical transition into adulthood. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Nellieshy Mamuad, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (East Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Nellieshy Mamuad and I am 24 years old. I entered foster care at the age of 12 and aged out at 18. I am a member of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit my testimony in support of SB 1340, which would allow voluntary extension of foster care until age 21.

Foster youth are wards of the state, which simply means that the state is our parent. For our out-of-care peers the nurturing and support of their parents is not something that abruptly ends at the age of 18. Our foster youth deserve to be afforded this same nurturing and support by our parent, the state.

Many foster youth who age out of care at 18 are not fully prepared to enter the world on their own with what little to no resources we do have available. In East Hawaii, there is only 1 agency that I know of that has a specified program that offers continued supportive services for aged out foster youth.

Statistics show that 24% of young people aged out of foster care have been homeless at least once by the time they are 24 years old. Furthermore, former foster youth at the age of 24 are earning more than \$10,000 less per year than their peers in the general population. Adding the lack of supportive adults who can help them find housing, write a rental reference or even co-sign, our former foster youth are at a huge disadvantage in succeeding at obtaining stable housing. Sadly, housing is just one of the many basic-need areas that our young people must fight to navigate on their own once they have aged out of the system.

In closing, I would like to humbly ask that you support and pass SB 1340, so that our foster youth can have the opportunity to be afforded the same continuance of nurturing and support beyond 18 that their out-of-care peers are. Thank you.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Noy Worachit, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative, EPIC 'Ohana HYOI Assistant

Re: **Testimony in Support of SB 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

Good afternoon members of the House Committee on Judiciary. My name is Noy Worachit, I am 19 years old and I am the Vice-President of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative on Oahu. HI H.O.P.E.S. stands for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success. The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board provides the youth voice for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. Our work includes identifying needs of transitioning foster youth, educating stake holders and advocating for public will and policy changes.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340 which supports the voluntary option to extend jurisdiction for foster youth beyond age 18. I support the intent of this bill to have foster care extended up to age 21.

For some of those who have aged out of the system, they are often not ready to go out on their own or they lack the support they need to be successful adults, which is why I feel it is important that we should have the option of being in foster care until the age of 21. When I was 18, I was a single parent to my 2 year old daughter. I was working two jobs and also attending school full-time. The support I received throughout my transition out of foster care is similar to what extended foster care would be like in a sense. For example, my foster parents allowed my daughter and me to stay in their home even after I turned 18. They also cared for my daughter while I went to work and school and eventually became temporary legal guardians of my daughter to allow me to pursue my dreams of having a career in the military. It gave me peace of mind as a mother to know that no matter what happened, my children and I will always have someone to lean on for support.

Currently, I am only a few semesters away from obtaining my Associate's degree in Administration of Justice and I have also been with the same employer for nearly 2 years. I truly believe that I would not be here today if it were not for the support of my foster parents.

However, this is not the case for most foster youth. Many of them have very little or no support when they age out of foster care.

In Hawaii, 33% of former foster youth in a recent poll, ages 18 to 23, reported having couch-surfed or moved from home to home because they did not have a place to stay. That is more than the national average of 24% of former foster youth who experience some form of homelessness by age 24. In recent studies, 67 % of youth formerly in foster care are dependent on public assistance compared to only 7% of their peers who have never experienced foster care. And by age 23 and 24, youth formerly in care will earn a yearly median of \$8,000 compared to their peers at \$18,300. By extending foster care to 21, it will help increase positive

outcomes in employment and decrease negative outcomes in the areas of homelessness and dependency on public assistance.

I want to emphasize that I feel this is an important **option** for youth, and that they should have the choice to remain in foster care beyond 18, as long as they are willing and eligible.

In closing, I ask that you afford us the same opportunities as you would for your own children and I ask this committee to support the intent of and pass Senate Bill 1340. Thank you very much.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Rachel Burke, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (West Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Rachel Burke and I am 19 years old. I am part of the West Hawaii HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board. I fully support SB 1340.

Extending voluntary foster care to the age of 21 is very important for several reasons. At age 18 most youth are not able to support themselves. It takes a while to get a job, buy a vehicle, find a place to live, and still be able to save money. By extending the age to 21, it gives young people an opportunity to have the support system they need to get these things done. This gives them a chance to slowly start doing things on their own but also being able to turn to someone for help. I think this bill is crucial to the success of foster youth in Hawaii.

When I aged out of foster care I had a great support system. I had my foster family who told me multiple times that I would always have a place to stay; that they weren't kicking me out at 18. They helped me with transportation, finding a job, getting a place to stay, buying groceries etc. To be honest, I would not have been able to accomplish anything without my support system. I am very thankful that I have them and I can always turn to them for help.

I ask your support in passing SB 1340. Thank you.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Samantha U'u, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Maui)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Samantha U'u, I'm 18, and I am a member of the Maui HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunity Initiative. I would like to submit a testimony in support of SB 1340. The Bill supports the extension of voluntary foster care up to age 21.

I aged out of the foster care system when I turned 18 last February. I knew what I wanted, but I didn't know how to achieve it. I didn't have the knowledge of where to go or what to do because nothing was planned out. I was lucky enough to be guided through the process of what I wanted for my future because I continued on with my schooling.

My brother on the other hand struggled much more. He was homeless at one point because he did not receive the necessary support that he needed. Statistics show that many former foster youth experience a form of homelessness and my brother was one of them. To get out of the state of being homeless he decided to continue on with his schooling in college. He received the support that he needed, but later found out that school wasn't for him. When he dropped out of college, the support stopped, as well. I feel that if he had a planned out future along with support of other people he wouldn't have been homeless at the time, with nothing other than school support to rely on.

In closing, I would like to ask this committee to pass SB 1340. To help other foster youth out there to receive the necessary support they need to plan out their future. Thank you.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Sassy Lean, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (East Hawaii),**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Princess Johnisa Lean, I am 19 years old and I was born on the island of Oahu, and raised on the Big Island of Hawaii. I am the Vice President of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board in East Hawaii. Although my mother had custody of me, I lived with family members and my godparents for majority of my childhood. As an adolescent I lived with my mother until I was placed in foster care in my sophomore year in high school. I was granted guardianship with my foster parent until I aged out of foster care.

I lost connections with my siblings and their children while I was in foster care. They remained in the custody of my mother when I was placed in my foster home. I was fortunate enough to remain in one placement throughout my experience in foster care. My guardian and I acquired a powerful bond that till this day has never changed. I still call her for advice and I am always welcomed in her home. She has given me a sense of stability, guidance and permanency. Besides her role as a mother to me, she is a Social Worker for Child Protective Services in Hawaii. She has supported me as a parent would their own child, she treated me no different from her biological children and helped me achieve a successful transition into adulthood.

I support SB 1340 regarding Voluntary Foster Care Act to extend care to 21 in Hawaii. I believe that offering foster youth the option to remain in foster care up until the age of 21 would increase their chances of a positive and successful transition into adulthood. Youth that age out of care with no support, no social capital, no guidance, no stability, and no sense of permanency will either become homeless, or incarcerated. I strongly feel that no 18 year old whether in foster care or not is ready to live on their own. As foster youth the state is our parent, so the option of foster care to 21 will help increase our success as adults. Many youth in the general population at the age of 18 can continue to live with their parents, therefore I believe that foster youth should have the same option to ensure successful transitions into adulthood. I ask this committee to please pass SB 1340. Thank you.

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Sharla-Ann Fujimoto**, Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative,
EPIC 'Ohana

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

Aloha, my name is Sharla-Ann Fujimoto and I work for EPIC 'Ohana, Inc. and assist with the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative and the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board in West Hawai'i.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340, which extends voluntary foster care to the age of 21. I have worked with youth in foster care and formerly in foster care for almost five years and I feel that this is a population in need of support.

Today, there is a youth turning 18, but they are not celebrating the way their peers normally would because this youth is a foster youth. This foster youth is packing their things (most likely into trash bags) while asking themselves the question, "Where am I going to go?" This youth will most likely end up homeless on the street or will end up going back to the biological family they were taken away from only to face the same traumas that that landed them in foster care to begin with. This youth will most likely face extremely poor outcomes because they do not have adequate support.

Those of us who have not been in the foster care system do not understand the true pressure behind turning 18. Most of us were excited at the prospect of turning 18. Most of us have had parents help us out get into college, buy a computer, help us with transportation, and maintain a stable living situation. Most of us that have not been in foster care were not expected to find a job, find housing, get into college, and find adequate transportation on the same day we turned 18. Most of us had a choice if we wanted to leave home or not. For our youth aging out of care, they have no choice and they are absolutely terrified of their 18th birthday—they are expected to make huge life decisions that they may not be developmentally able to make at such a young age and without adequate supports put into place.

I fully support this bill because if youth in foster care were given the option to remain in care up until the age of 21, they would have a few more years to build the adequate support they need to become successful, self-sufficient adults. They would be able to experience a different type of foster care that is developmentally appropriate for them. They would be given the chance to plan their life as they see fit for them because they would have more than just one day to make all of the huge life decisions.

In closing, I humbly ask this committee to pass SB 1340. It would benefit the foster youth by supporting the notion that we believe in them and that supports do not end at the age of 18. Thank you.

LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Tiffany Darragh, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Maui)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Tiffany Darragh, I am 19 years old and a member of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board on Maui. I recently aged out of foster care on Maui.

I support Senate Bill 1340 to extend voluntary foster care to 21 because I know many youth who have aged out who have absolutely no place to go. They are living at the park or jumping from friend's house to friend's house. If foster care was extended to the age of 21 there would be less worries about where the youth are going with their lives.

When my brother aged out, he was kicked out of my grandparent's house. My brother had never had a job and he didn't do much thinking on how he would find housing. So aging out was a big shock for him. My brother was homeless for a while. He decided to go to college to make his life better. Our independent living worker helped him find a cheap place that he could afford with money he received for higher education every month. My brother is on food stamps. Then he also lost that place he was staying at. Once again, he was on the streets. I felt bad for him but there was nothing I could do. If the system extends care to the age of 21 then no youth in the future would have to go through what my brother and many others have gone through.

Please support Senate Bill 1340. Mahalo.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**

Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Tiffany “Ipo” Lynch Ma’e, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (East Hawaii)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative

Re: **Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

My name is Tiffany “Ipo” Lynch Ma’e and I am the president of the East Hawaii HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board.

I would like to submit testimony in support of SB 1340 and the option it provides for voluntary extended foster care up to age 21.

1 in 5 youth who age out of care become homeless. And only 3 percent of youth who aged out of care graduate with a bachelor’s degree. It’s a haunting future. The extension of foster care to 21 as an option promotes a healthy transition into adulthood for my foster brothers and sisters in care.

Without a shadow of a doubt, I feel that with the passing of this bill the negative statistics that haunt youth in care will change from negative to positive. Where only 3 percent of foster youth DON’T graduate with a college degree and 97% complete one.

We are taken into care by the State, who becomes our ‘parent’, and promised a better life than the ones our families are able to provide us. When my peers turn 18, their parents don’t stop loving or supporting them. Why then, are foster youth expected to survive on our own with little or no preparation or supports when we turn 18?

In closing, I humbly ask that this committee passes SB 1340 and give my foster brothers and sisters the continued support they need and deserve through their transition to adulthood. Mahalo nui loa.



LATE

To: **Committee on Ways and Means**
Tuesday, February 20, 2013
9:45am, Conference Room 211, State Capitol

From: **Tiffany Tuilata, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)**
Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative, EPIC 'Ohana HYOI Assistant

Re: **Testimony in Support of SB 1340, Relating to Foster Care**

Good afternoon, members of the Committee on Judiciary. My name is Tiffany Tuilata and I am a member of the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 1340 and support the intent of the voluntary foster care act, which extends the option to remain in foster care up to age 21.

I'm 24 and I aged out of foster care while on the run. I immediately found myself homeless with no support or knowledge on the resources available. When you find yourself sleeping in public restrooms or beaches, you begin to wish you had someone you could rely on or someone who could lend a helping hand. Just thinking of where my next meal would come from or when it would be safe to sleep in the park, it isn't a feeling that any youth should endure. As recent as a year ago, I found myself homeless with two children.

Thankfully, I participated in the Opportunity Passport Program, a program through the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative which teaches financial literacy training, helps us open bank accounts and have our money matched for asset purchases. I was able to use my matched savings account to make my first purchase for a housing deposit and first month's rent. I was so happy to have a place for me and my children to call home.

Nationally, statistics show that 24% of former foster youth will experience some form of homelessness due to the fact that they don't have a place to stay after they age out of care and don't have supportive adult relationships. Unfortunately, I was one of those statistics and I don't wish any transitioning youth to experience the hardship of being without a home or a supportive adult.

In closing, I would humbly ask this committee to pass Senate Bill 1340 and give foster youth the option to receive the continued support they need to be successful adults in our community. Thank you very much.

