

LATE

TESTIMONY ON SB 391 RELATING TO YOUTH
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

January 29, 2013

1:30 pm

Conference Rm. 016

Aloha Chair Chun Oakland, Vice-Chair Green, and members of the Senate Committee on Human Services. My name is Stephen Morse and I am the Executive Director of Blueprint for Change. I am here to testify in **support of SB 391 Relating to Youth**, particularly as it relates to the establishment of a coordinator position as well as the implementation of a pilot program where youth have access to various support services, resources, guidance, and advice where as they otherwise would not have anywhere to go and no one to turn to in times of crisis.

Providing these types of intervention services and resources were identified as a priority by Hawai'i's youth in the 2012 Children & Youth Summit sponsored by the Legislative Keiki Caucus in October. After the Summit, the Keiki Caucus formed the Safehouse Working Group to explore alternatives to establishing a safehouse for youth system in Hawaii. The Working Group found that many of the needed safehouse services are already being provided by existing social service organizations, but there was a need to better coordinate a safehouse continuum of services and find better ways to communicate available safehouse resources to children and youth. Of major importance to working group members was the concern expressed by Madeline Sckrocki, President of the State Student Council, that youth who run away from abusive home or school environments are often afraid to seek help for fear of being arrested; and that therefore, there is a need to de-criminalize the efforts by youth to seek help.

Of special concern to us should be the need for a coordinated safehouse system in remote, rural areas of the State where youth are often underserved. In January of 2012, the Director of our Neighborhood Place of Puna reported that a young, 7th grade girl began dropping into the office, located directly across the street from Paho School, sporadically over a period of 2 months. After 2 months, she began coming every day and often during school hours. It turns out that besides having a poor home environment, the girl was being bullied at school. NP staff believed the bullying was the result of the girl's ambiguity about her sexual identity. Eventually, NP staff was able to work with Paho School counselors to get the girl additional services she needed, but it was a difficult process because of the lack of services in lower Puna.

I am again, strongly in support of SB 391 Relating to Youth. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify afternoon.