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LATE

Date: January 25, 2014

To: Senate Committee on Human Services

Re: Opposition to SB 2211

Dear Chair Chun-Oakland and Members of the Senate Committee on Human Services:

I am a family law attorney, and possess a graduate degree in Counseling and Guidance with a focus on children. I oppose SB 2211 for the following reasons.

1. The bill undermines parental rights and creates an escape for children who habitually make destructive choices. Children who habitually engage in destructive behavior may enjoy an option of a "Safe Place." Some of them get in trouble with an authority figure or their parents because of their behavior: skip school, abuse drugs and alcohol, do not want to listen to their teachers or parents, refuse to complete homework assignments, refuse to do chores, abuse a younger child or even the parent, use excessive profanity, refuse to abide by parental curfews and rules, watch excessive television or play too many video games, steal, violate the law, and so forth. By giving these kinds of children a "safe place," there will be no discipline or consequences for their destructive behavior, and little reason to change.
2. There are laws, regulations and mechanisms already in place to protect children from abuse, neglect and bullying. In an abuse or neglect case, a child may simply call the police, talk to their teacher/school counselor, Child Protective Services or other authority figure. They can also talk to another family member to see if another relative would be willing to take legal action on their behalf, such as filing a petition for guardianship or be placed in foster care. Children who are bullied can report the bullying to their teacher, counselor, principal, coach or other person in authority. These adults should be adequately trained to address these issues, and protect and help the victim and to deal with, counsel and/or discipline the bully. If a child is struggling with alcohol or drug abuse, pregnancy or other issue, he or she can see a school counselor. In such cases, the parents should be notified and involved in helping their child. If there is a shortage of school counselors, the number should be increased.
3. A Court Order should be required in all circumstances in which a third party makes decisions belonging to a parent. Parental rights should not be subordinated to the authority Office of the Youth, or other state department without a court order. I believe it is an unconstitutional usurpation of the rights of a parent. Court orders are required for a state agency such as the Child Protective Services to have custody of a child.
4. In addition, the provision regarding immunity from criminal or civil prosecution is disturbing. Also, a minor should not be given the authority to make decisions that belong to the parent, or to a court of law. If a minor desires to makes his/her own decisions and Legislature supports that, then consider passing an emancipation statute.

For the reasons mentioned above and others, I urge you to vote no on this bill. Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Sandra Young

LATE

SB2211

Submitted on: 1/25/2014

Testimony for HMS on Jan 25, 2014 10:00AM in Conference Room 229

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Scott Wall	Community Alliance for Mental Health	Support	No

Comments: To: The Senate Committee on Human Services Aloha Sen. Chun-Oakland and members of the Committee, On behalf of the Community Alliance for Mental Health as well as United Self Help we would like to lend our strong support for SB2211. We believe that there can be little of more import to our youth than having a safe place where they can go and develop strong life skills. Scott Wall VP/Legislative Advocate Community Alliance for Mental Health

TESTIMONY ON SB 2211 RELATING TO YOUTH
BEFORE THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

January 25, 2014

10:00 am

Conference Rm. 229

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 2211 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 both the 2012 and 2013 Children & Youth Summit sponsored by the Legislative Keiki Caucus. After the Summits, 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 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 Pahoa 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 Pahoa 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 2211 Relating to Youth. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify afternoon.