



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES
707 Richards Street, Suite 525
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

February 29, 2016

TO: The Honorable Sylvia Luke, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Merton Chinen, Executive Director

SUBJECT: HB 1987 HD1 Relating to Youth Gangs

Hearing: Tuesday, March 1, 2016, 11:02 a.m.
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

OFFICE'S POSITION: OYS supports the intent of the measure but requests that any appropriation not affect the priorities in the Executive Biennium Budget. OYS agrees that many factors can contribute toward an apparent increase in graffiti, violence, substance abuse and criminal activities. Risk factors such as poverty, higher concentrations of immigration, lack of parental guidance and supervision, and social disorganization in the community can negatively impact a community and its ability to respond to an apparent youth gang problem. Careful analysis of the extent and depth of the type of criminal activity, and apparent symptoms of underlying social and economic dynamics is required prior to committing valuable resources toward any initiative related to our State's at-risk and troubled youth.

OYS supports a coordinated and multi-agency approach to strengthen and improve a community's response in addressing problems affecting a community such as youth violence. Currently, prevention and intervention efforts are underway through ongoing partnerships with various resources such as the police, Department of Education, Judiciary, community-based agencies, and the University of Hawaii, to address problems such as increased criminal activities that may be more related to ethnic and geographic concerns rather than a strict definition of gang activity.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the measure is to appropriate funds for a coordinated gang response system to include the county police departments, and the Office of Youth Services

Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

TESTIMONY

FINANCE COMMITTEE

TUESDAY, MARCH 1, 2016

11:02 a.m.; Conference Room 308

Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair, Finance Committee, Rep. Scott Nishimoto, Vice-Chair

By: Dennis Arakaki for the Kalihi Community Youth Violence and Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Group.

Aloha Mai Keia auinala kakou, Chair Luke and Vice Chair Nishimoto and members of the House Finance Committee. I stand in strong support of HB 1987, HD1.

As the voluntary convenor of the Kalihi Community Youth Violence and Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Group, I want to relay our concerns for the growing incidences of youth violence in our communities and neighborhoods. We have seen and heard reports about a proliferation of violence on school campuses, parks, housing complex', fast food establishments and almost all public places that youth gather. These fights, that some refer to as gang fights, occur quickly as young people use the latest communication devices to spread the word which allow them to gather and disperse very quickly.

Kalihi is a melting pot of diverse cultures and ethnicities where many young immigrants and families get their start. The socio-economic factors that are woven throughout the community lead many young people feeling isolated and even excluded from the mainstream cultures as well as academic and economic successes. It's unfortunate but there is de facto segregation by ethnicity and socio-economic factors that are not intentional but create a community of youth faced with alienation caused by lack of opportunity to join the mainstream culture. Thus, the so called gangs are centered on territorial identities and ethnic similarities as their source of pride.

At the hearing by the Human Services and Education Committees, our coalition recommended that sections be deleted in order to emphasize the importance of the remaining sections and to reduce the appropriations requested. We feel that what is

left are basic tools needed to coordinate services and to emphasize the importance of prevention and intervention approaches while giving the enforcement agencies the tools to stay on top of the issue.

Also important are the services provided by the community non-profits that I have also attached an addendum to my testimony which lists programs and services that are vital to prevention and intervention of youth violence, delinquency and gang activity.

While the bill is introduced at the request of the Kalihi Youth Violence and Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Group, the signs of organized youth gang activities are island wide and even state wide. Kalihi are like the “canaries in the mine” and the problems that face our community serve as indicators of more ominous problems we face statewide with our youth. We know this because the legislature was able to confront the problem with a comprehensive approach of enforcement, intervention and prevention. The gang problem shows indication of rearing its ugly head again and we need to move swiftly to provide the tools needed to prevent widespread violence and crime in our communities. The Task Group members recognize the importance and effectiveness of prevention and intervention strategies that provide programs and activities that keep youth out of the judicial system and the costly alternatives of rehabilitation and treatment.

I urge you to pass this measure for third reading with a strong recommendation for funding statewide. Mahalo!



Adult Friends for Youth

3375 Koapaka Street, Suite B290 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96819 • (808) 833-8775 • FAX: (808) 833-6469
E-mail: afy@afyhawaii.com • Web Page: <http://www.afyhawaii.com>

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Submitted to Committee on Finance
Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
Representative Scott Nishimoto, Vice Chair

Submitted by:
Deborah L.K. Spencer-Chun
President and CEO of Adult Friends for Youth

AFY supports the intent of HB 1987, which recognizes the magnitude of the youth gang problem and the need for a coordinated approach to address this issue. The Kalihi Youth Gang Prevention and Intervention Task Force collaborates with many frontline agencies including AFY. Investing money into a response system will take away from direct services that are badly needed. I understand many agencies provide preventive services which is vastly needed for our young keiki. I also understand that collaboration for a study on criminal activity due to ethnicity and geographic locations are in the works. However, the youth gang problem demands badly needed direct services. AFY and our allied partners remain steadfast in our approach to address this problem. Hence, HB 2163 HD 1 addresses the youth gang problem through the provision of direct service funding. Our strong recommendation is to defer to HB2163 HD1.

