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**TESTIMONY FOR SENATE BILL 2442, SD1, RELATING TO CHILDREN
AND YOUTH DAY**

**Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Hon. Jill N. Tokuda, Chair
Hon. Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Vice Chair**

**Friday, February 26, 2016, 9:40 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 211**

Honorable Chair Tokuda and committee members:

I am Kris Coffield, representing the IMUAlliance, a nonpartisan political advocacy organization that currently boasts over 350 local members. On behalf of our members, we offer this testimony in strong support of SB 2442, SD1, relating to children and youth day.

To promote the well-being of Hawai'i's most precious resource, lawmakers should declare Children and Youth Day a state event. That resource is our keiki themselves, along with the families responsible for their care. Over 300,000 children live in the islands, according to the latest U.S. Census figures, 13 percent of whom live in poverty. These children deserve a chance to develop the kind of healthy bodies, minds, and relationships supported by each of Children and Youth Day's 300 sponsors.

Yet, last year, the state's largest family happening faced unprecedented scrutiny. Citing laws prohibiting state officials from using government resources to plan private affairs, State Ethics Commission Chair Les Kondo challenged Sen. Suzanne Chun Oakland's role in facilitating the celebration, saying that employment of the senator's office and staff in coordinating Children and Youth Day violated the state ethics code. Kondo further objected to Sen. Chun Oakland's representation of the day as a state event on permitting applications, suggesting that the mistake puts taxpayers on the hook for liability claims if someone gets injured on Capitol grounds. While a state law enacted in 1994 annually recognizes the first Sunday in October as Children and Youth Day, the ethics chair contended that the statute, itself, does not make the day an official state event in the absence

of a formal declaration from the governor or change to state law. Owing to Kondo's criticism, several last-minute changes were made to Children and Youth Day, including storage of "keiki goodie bags" at St. Andrew's Cathedral, removal of the state seal from promotional materials, and assumption of liability coverage by Kiwanis International. Though these adjustments allowed the event to move forward, participants bore the cost of revising their own resources and purchasing liability insurance, no small burden for small, cash-strapped nonprofits.

Moreover, failing to designate Children and Youth Day as a state event erodes our government's commitment to families. When the law establishing Children and Youth Day was amended in 2012 to explicitly permit use of the Capitol grounds, the Senate Human Services Committee said in a committee report that the day, "encourages, supports, and promotes educating and strengthening families, involving citizens in public policy development, promoting access to the legislative process, and informing legislators of the issues and challenges facing Hawaii's children and youth." Those findings were later echoed by the Ways and Means Committee, chaired by then-senator David Ige. As one of the state's chief fiscal custodians, Ige undoubtedly reviewed the numbers showcasing the event's success: 40,000 attendees enjoying over 150 activities and engaging with hundreds of organizations about early learning, childhood nutrition, abuse prevention, and more.

For impoverished guests, Children and Youth Day is a rare opportunity to partake in free food and entertainment. On O'ahu, the latest homeless count tallied 556 households (or families) with 2,340 adults and children, including 1,319 under the age of 18. As lawmakers reflect on how best to house our most vulnerable population, they should also support programming that broadens policy talks by connecting public leaders with those they serve.

It's often said that it takes a village to raise a child. If that's true, then we must bring our island villages together by giving Children and Youth Day the government's backing. After last year's near fiasco, it is the most ethical thing to do. Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in strong support of this bill.

Sincerely,
Kris Coffield
Executive Director
IMUAlliance

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
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SB2442

Submitted on: 2/25/2016

Testimony for WAM on Feb 26, 2016 09:40AM in Conference Room 211

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Dylan Armstrong	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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