

March 1, 2016

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS

Tuesday, March 1, 2016 at 1:40 P.M.
Conference Room 211, State Capitol

RE: SENATE BILL 2476 SD1 RELATING TO HEALTH

Dear Chair Tokuda:

My name is Mala Arkin and I am a resident of Honolulu. As you know, Senate Bill 2476 passed its joint committee referral with amendments. I believe that the new language in the SD1 version takes away from the true focus of the bill: Ensuring systemic language accountability that is vital towards the success of our Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and Deafblind (DHHDB) children. **SB 2476 is a measure of utmost importance** for Hawai'i's DHHDB children and their families. **I urge you to vote for it, with the critical amendments described below.**

Amendments I urge you to make to SB 2476 SD1 include, but aren't limited to, the following:

- 1) Language spelling out a separation of duties between the Department of Health and the Department of Education, as well as language defining how they will *jointly* work together to ensure that all DHHDB children are linguistically kindergarten ready. This is because there are two agencies who are *jointly* held accountable for children in the 0-5 age range.
- 2) Language requiring the working group to develop a parent resource specifically, and exclusively, for developing, monitoring and tracking their DHHDB child's expressive and receptive language acquisition and developmental stages toward language and literacy. This is to ensure that parents are empowered and well-informed on how their child can appropriately develop language and literacy skills.
- 3) Language that will require departments to jointly produce an annual report, using existing data reported in compliance with the federally required state performance plan on pupils with disabilities, that is specific to language and literacy development of DHHDB children from birth to five years of age. This is to address the importance of collecting system-wide outcome data on children's development of language and literacy skills.
- 4) Language that will ensure that at least half of the working group members are individuals who are DHHDB. This was included in the original version of the bill, and is not in the SD1 version of the bill. We ask that this be re-inserted. This is to safeguard the *critical* inclusion of DHHDB individuals in the development and implementation of early intervention systems for DHHDB keiki.

- 5) On multiple instances throughout the SD1 version, “may” needs to be replaced with “shall.”

For specifics regarding proposed amendments, including additional recommendations, I defer to written testimony submitted by the Aloha State Association of the Deaf, the Hawai’i School for the Deaf and the Blind School Community Council.

The DHHDB community has been ignored for too long. According to the 2015 Hawai’i Department of Education State Systemic Improvement Plan, only 14% of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students demonstrate reading proficiency, compared to 74% for students without disabilities. It is staggering to think that 86% of our Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing students are illiterate. SB 2476 will ensure that necessary steps are taken to end this statewide epidemic of language deprivation that our DHHDB keiki currently struggle with.

It is time for decisive action – such as SB 2476 – to ensure that Hawai’i is held accountable for the success of its keiki. **Please vote in support of this bill, and incorporate the critical amendments described above.**

Sincerely,

Mala Arkin

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