

SB 2878

Measure Title: RELATING TO YOUTH TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER CARE.

Report Title: Youth Transitioning From Foster Care

Description: Extends the application deadline for financial assistance for higher education available to foster or former foster youth, clarifies that financial assistance is for related higher education costs, and clarifies eligibility and program requirements of the Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care Program.

Companion: [HB2349](#)

Package: Governor

Current Referral: HMS, WAM/JDL

Introducer(s): KOUCHI (Introduced by request of another party)



1130 N. NIMITZ HWY, SUITE C-210, HONOLULU, HI 96817
PHONE: (808) 838-7752 TOLL FREE: (866) 636-1644 FAX: (808) 838-1653

Senate Committee on Human Services, Tuesday, February 16, 2016

From: **Delia Ulima, Statewide Initiative Coordinator**

Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative, EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.

Re: **In SUPPORT of SB 2878**

Aloha! My name is Delia Ulima and I am a Statewide Initiative Coordinator for the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative. We are the local site for the national Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative and EPIC 'Ohana is the lead agency for this Initiative in Hawai'i. The Initiative works with systems, such as the Department of Human Services, Child Welfare, Family Court and young people, service providers and partners within the public and private sector to create opportunities and support transitioning foster youth to successfully move into adulthood and become a contributing part of our community.

I would like to submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 2878 which expands the time that former foster youth may apply for higher education payments from age twenty-two to age twenty-six. This bill also allows more young people, namely those in temporary or voluntary foster care, to participate in the Voluntary Foster Care program (Imua Kākou) up to age twenty-one. These two amendments will make a big impact on the lives of young people.

Young people in foster care are often placed in a number of foster homes and schools over the course of their time in care. It is common for them to fall behind academically and to be impacted mentally and emotionally because they have experienced abuse, trauma and separation from family. Many leave the foster care system as adults unable to handle the pressures of school, work and having to fend for themselves all at the same time. Only 3% of former foster youth will earn a four year college degree. This is the result of some of the challenges which I've outlined earlier. As young people grow, mature, heal and become more stable in their lives, they are often more ready to attend college at a later point in time. Having the opportunity to receive higher education payment support at a later age would mean the world to so many young people and may increase the likelihood of them earning some type of vocational or academic certificate or degree. This, in turn, can positively impact their career options and earning power.

The second half of SB 2878 expands the eligibility of young people for the Voluntary Foster Care program, which provides monetary, medical and case management support for former foster youth. It would include young people who were in voluntary or temporary care when they turned 18. It would include young people who may have been adopted or in guardianship but whose parents no longer want to take care of them and it includes young people who may have had children as minors in foster care and whose own children were 'taken into foster custody'. This program, referred to now as Imua Kākou, was something that young people advocated for. It is been in effect since July 1, 2014 and has already made a difference in so many lives. It provides extra support during the vulnerable and critical first years of independent adulthood. This support can be a lifeline and assist with housing, transportation and education.

These young people are amongst our society's most vulnerable. They are OUR keiki and deserve the best chance at a good and productive life. For these reasons, I strongly encourage this committee to support the passage of SB 2878. Mahalo nui loa for your time and kōkua.



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FamilyProgramsHawaii.com

TO: *Committee on Human Services*
Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Gil Riviere, Vice Chair

HEARING: Tuesday, February 16, 2016
1:25 PM
Conference Room 016

FROM: Judith Wilhoite
Family Advocate
It Takes An Ohana

RE: SB 2878 - Relating to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am the Family Advocate for Family Program Hawaii's It Takes An Ohana (ITAO) program and a resource caregiver, formerly referred to as foster parent. I, along with my Advisory Committee, strongly support SB 2878.

According to the National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, "Success in school can be a positive counterweight to the abuse, neglect, separation and impermanence experienced by children and youth in foster care". Increasing the time for former foster youth to apply for higher education stipends by 4 years may help improve their life chances and *ability to contribute to society as productive adults*.

Foster youth may take longer than their peers to be ready for higher education due to many factors, a few of which are:

- Children in foster care tend to experience high levels of grade retention.
- Children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education that are higher than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system.
- Significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs
- Children in foster care frequently experience school changes and each time they change schools, they fall farther and farther behind.
- School mobility has negative effects on academic achievement.

As advocates for foster youth, we are extremely excited to see this bill that will improve the Young Adult Voluntary Foster Care Act passed in 2013 as well as increase the number of former foster youth who can utilize Hawaii's state of the art Higher Education program. We strongly support SB 2878.

We help kids

HAWAII YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Boulevard, Suite 904 Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

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Rick Collins, President

Judith F. Clark, Executive Director

Big Brothers Big Sisters of
Hawaii

Bobby Benson Center

Central Oahu Youth Services
Association

Child and Family Service

Coalition for a Drug Free Hawaii

Domestic Violence Action Center

EPIC, Inc.

Family Programs Hawaii

Family Support Hawaii

Hale Kipa, Inc.

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Hawaii Student Television

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Life Foundation

Marimed Foundation

Maui Youth and Family Services

P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.

Parents and Children Together
(PACT)

Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest and
Hawaiian Islands

Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services

Sex Abuse Treatment Center

Susannah Wesley Community
Center

The Catalyst Group

Uhane Pohaku Na Moku

O Hawai'i

Waikiki Health

February 11, 2016

To: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Human Services

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 2878 RELATING TO YOUTH TRANSITIONING FROM FOSTER CARE

Hawaii Youth Services Network, a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 2878 Relating to Youth Transitioning from Foster Care.

Increasing opportunities to complete college and vocational programs results in higher earning potential over a lifetime. Young adults who have spent time in foster care need the time and supports to succeed in college. Nationally:

- Only 50% of foster youth have completed high school by age 18.
- 84% of foster youth want to attend college.
- Only 2-9% of former foster youth attain a bachelor's degree.

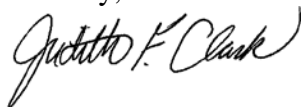
Hawaii's current higher education program for foster youth is improving those statistics, and this bill will increase its success. In the three years after Hawaii extended the enrollment period for college to age 21, the number of Hawaii's former foster youth enrolled in college doubled. Extending eligibility for higher education benefits to age 26 will result in better economic outcomes and reduced homelessness for youth aging out of foster care.

The changes in language that describe the higher education payment as a stipend rather than a room and board allowance will give recipients the flexibility to apply the funds where they are most needed.

HYSN also supports the amendments to the voluntary foster care to 21 program (Imua Kakou).

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director

To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016

From: Brayden Santiago, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT OF SB 2878

Good afternoon, my name is Brayden Santiago I am 23 years old and I am the vice president of the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative on Kauai. HI H.O.P.E.S stands for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success. The HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Boards provide the youth voice for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative and serve as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-Child Welfare Services. Our work involves us advocating for changes within the foster care systems and increased opportunities for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

I would like to submit a testimony in support of Bill 2878. That's raises the age for the higher ed payments to be increased for the foster youth that really aren't ready to go college. This bill also allows Imua kakou participants who are parents to receive payments while their child's case are still open. This also will allow temporary foster youth be allowed the privilege to be eligible for Imua Kakou. Imua Kakou is very important for the youth that needs that assistance to help them get on their feet after they are transitioned from foster care to adulthood.

Even though I have never received any of these assistance from these programs. I know how important it is to find your own independence and to be an adult at the age of 18. I was fortunate to have been reunified with my biological family. But many foster youth don't have that chance to be reunified or have somewhere to go. So even though that you may not even go back to your family you still would need that help and guidance because the world is scary especially the trauma that foster youth go through and it's hard for them to get back into a new routine of being alone. So for those who were temporarily in care should have a chance also to receive these benefits and give them the fair Chance that they deserve in life to succeed. With the right guidance and support these things are possible. So please give these youth a chance to prove that they can succeed with these new laws that we would like to set in place it would really be helpful for the youth because they can develop the skills the guidance and social capital that they need. Sometimes youth after high school in general aren't really for the college life right after graduations they need some time to decide whether what degree or courses they would like to take so it may take months or a year at times. In any case for foster youth they need all the support that they can get to help finance their goal and higher education payments can do that for these youth who are really serious about going to college. Making the payments extended will be greatly appreciated by the youth who can be eligible for this. People between ages 18-20 with low social capital had lower rates of stable housing (55%) compared with young people that had higher social capital.

This bill can help those to get the education and life skills that they need in order to function in society this can also teach them responsibility for their actions with the way they treat the financial and emotional support that they are gonna be receiving. Mahalo for taking the time to read my written testimony for senate bill 2878.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services
From: NOY WORACHIT, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

Good afternoon members of the House of Representatives Committee on Human Services. My name is Noy Worachit. I am 22 years old and I am the current Vice-President of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative on Oahu. HI H.O.P.E.S. stands for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success. The HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board provides the youth voice for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. Our work includes identifying needs of transitioning foster youth, educating stake holders and advocating for public will and policy changes.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 2878 which would increase the time for former foster youth to apply for higher education stipends by 4 years.

In Hawaii, 57% of young people formerly in foster care experienced homelessness. At the age of 18, these young people don't even have a safe place to sleep at night and wondering where their next meal is going to come from. Some of these young people have children of their own that live on the streets or in shelters with them. This is the reality for former foster youth who do not have a strong support system when leaving foster care. It is extremely difficult to make higher education a priority through this transition phase when they are just trying to survive. By increasing the time for former foster youth to apply for higher education stipends by 4 years, it gives young people the chance to get on their feet as these things take time and eventually pursue a higher education. With an education, the hope is that it will help to end this vicious generational cycle of poverty.

In closing, I ask that you please give us a fighting chance to be productive and contributing adults in our communities by passing SB 2878. Thank you so much for your time.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016
From: Kaitlyn Anderson, HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

My name is Kaitlyn Anderson. I am 16 years old and I am the secretary of the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board. HI H.O.P.E.S stands for Hawai'i Helping Our People Envision Success, the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Boards across Hawai'i provide youth voice for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative. Also, our work involves us advocating for changes within the foster care systems and increased opportunities for youth leaving foster care to adulthood to make sure they become successful within their communities.

I would like to submit testimony in support for Senate Bill 2878 which extends the time for foster youth to apply for higher education stipends from age 21 to the age 26 ½. Allowing foster youth to start college at a later time is helpful because it might take them longer than their peers to be prepared for college or a higher education.

As youth in care are moved around a lot they tend to move schools, which have a negative effect on their academic achievement. Having to frequently change schools, foster youth fall behind in the material they are learning. They tend to experience high levels of grade retention. A significant percent of children in foster care have special education needs. Children in care also experience emotional and behavioral problems that impact their education at rates higher than their peers that have not been involved with the child welfare system. If foster youth have this amazing opportunity to have the ability to receive higher education stipends until age 26 ½, they would feel more confident in applying for college and actually go through with it. As a result, there will be a significant increase in our former foster youth's success rate.

In closing, I ask this committee to support the intent of and pass Senate Bill 2878. Thank you very much.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016
From: Patricia Duh, HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

Good afternoon, my name is Patricia Duh. I am currently 20 years of age and have been in the foster care system for 7 years. I am the president of the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative on Kauai. HI H.O.P.E.S stands for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success. The HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Boards provide the youth voice for the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative and serve as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-Child Welfare Services. Our work involves us advocating for changes within the foster care systems and increased opportunities for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 2878 which “extends the deadline for former foster youth to apply to financial assistance for higher education costs from age twenty-two to age twenty-six.” This senate bill also amends pieces from the voluntary foster care agreement to allow parents whose children may be in foster care with an open case to still receive Imua Kakou payments and be a part of the program. It also deems youth in temporary and voluntary foster custody at age 18 to be eligible for Imua Kakou as well. This bill is a great opportunity to allow youth to continue on with higher education if they do not plan on pursuing it right out of high school. It also broadens eligibility to give more youth help who were affected by the foster care system.

As a former foster youth, current Imua Kakou participant, and soon to be receiving higher education assistance again, I can definitely say that these programs are vital to a youth’s well-being and to create a stable and healthy future for oneself. I received higher education payments as soon as I turned 18 up until the Imua Kakou program came out in July 1, 2014. This program has really changed my life especially since I had my daughter. Not only have I been able to receive monthly living assistance payments for myself but I’ve also received them for my daughter which has been a huge help in being able to start a savings account for her. I didn’t have family to turn to once I moved to Kauai but receiving the help from my case manager and D.H.S workers has made me feel cared for and that I wasn’t alone. Being able to have this help offered to me, I feel has made me become more successful in life from obtaining a bigger house for my family to getting a job. I feel that every youth should have the opportunity to get help beyond the age of 18 because in all honesty, a lot of youth in the foster care system simply aren’t ready to take on the world by themselves at 18 and a lot of us don’t have the same support system as our peers do. Extending the age to apply for higher education assistance is another fantastic opportunity because growing up as a foster youth sometimes we don’t do so well education wise. Nationwide, only 60% of 19 year olds in foster care will obtain a high school diploma or G.E.D compared to 80% of the general population. When we don’t do so good in high school sometimes that negativity hinders our judgment on going to college. Extending the age to apply for this assistance will make us feel less pressured to have to jump into something as big as college without having really considered our options and being fully prepared for it.

In closing, I ask that the foster youth be given the same chance and opportunities as their peers. I ask that you support and pass Senate Bill 2878. Thank you for your time.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016
From: Gernani Yutob, Jr., HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

My name is Gernani Yutob, Jr., 25, and I am a former foster youth as well as the president of the O‘ahu HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board and a Youth Circle Facilitator for EPIC ‘Ohana, Inc. I strongly support SB 2878 relating to youth transitioning from foster care. Increasing the age to apply for the Higher Education Board Allowance Payments (Higher Ed) from age 22 to 26 ½ gives young people (another term used for former foster youth) more time to decide whether or not college is for them. There are some young people who emancipate from foster care who do not qualify for Imua Kākou. The requirements for Higher Ed are much stricter as well. Young people **MUST** attend college as a full-time student every semester (they’re only allowed two semesters where they can attend part-time). As mentioned previously, college is not a first priority for some young people. Some of them enter the workforce to take care of themselves or their families. Some also have other personal struggles that they’re dealing with that make college out of reach at the moment. Increasing the age from 22 to 26 ½ gives them more time to take care of themselves first before considering college and potentially giving themselves better opportunities in the future. I humbly ask your committee in joining me for the support of SB 2878. Thank you.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016
From: Catalina Landon, HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board (Kauai)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

Hello my name is Catalina Landon and I am the historian on the Kauai HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative). This is my testimony for Senate Bill 2878. This Bill will improve our life chances and abilities to contribute to society as productive adults. I know extending this bill will be great. “Why?” you may ask? To me personally, I am a slow learner. My head doesn't comprehend a lot of things. My biological mother never read any books to me as a kid and I never had any help with homework growing up. This is just some of what foster kids go through. I know some of my foster brothers and sisters who didn't know what they wanted to be and kept switched majors in college a lot. It just takes some of us longer than others that's all.

Other factors are things like school mobility; school mobility has negative effects on academic achievement. Another factor is children in foster care tend to experience high levels of grade retention. The next would be children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavior problems impacting their education that are higher than their peers who have not been involved in the child welfare system. In addition, significant percentages of children in foster care have special education needs. Last but not least, children in foster care frequently experience school changes and each time they change schools, they fall further and further behind.

Did you know that twenty five percent of young people formerly in foster care at age 23 and 24 haven't been able to attain a high school diploma or GED compared to only 7% of our peers who have not gone through the child welfare system. Also young people formally in foster care have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We are six times more likely than the general population and double the rate of veterans returning from war to get PTSD. Furthermore, 57% of young people formally in foster care do not have medical insurance coverage. This is compared to 78% of the general population. The reason being is the inability to navigate systems to transition to adult insurance options. This is my testimony for bill 2878.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016
From: Samantha U'u, HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board (Maui)
Re: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB 2878

Good afternoon members of the Senate Committee on Human Services. My name is Samantha U'u and I am 23 years old. I'm the Vice President of the HI H.O.P.E.S of the H.Y.O.I Youth Leadership Board on Maui. HI H.O.P.E.S stand for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success and the H.Y.O.I stands for Hawaii Youth Opportunity Initiative. As a Youth Leadership Board, we are the youth voice for the Youth Advisory Council for DHS- Child Welfare Services. We advocate for change within the foster care system to create opportunities for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

I would like to submit testimony in support of the Senate Bill 2878, which expands on increasing the time for former foster youth to apply for higher education stipend by four years. It's an opportunity for former foster youth to be able to obtain their higher education and/or to receive support to improve their chances and ability to contribute to society as productive adults.

I am strongly in support of this senate bill because it not just gives the opportunity to receive support, but it also gives former foster youth a chance at a higher education. Currently, only 6% of former foster youth had actually completed a 2 or 4 year degree. The reason for a low percentage is due to the lack of education about post-secondary education, the emotional and financial support by a parent or a caring adult, and housing option. I was very close to giving up on college because of the process of applying and not having the financial support, but with the help of a caring adult and the higher education stipend support it encouraged me to pursue my education. It gave me the best experience that I could have ever asked for and it gave me a peace of mind.

In closing, I asked that you give the same opportunity to former foster youth to pursue their educational goals and to support the intent of and pass Senate Bill 2878. Thank you for your time.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016

From: KEOLA LIMKIN, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT OF SB 2878

Good afternoon distinguished members of the Senate Committee on Human Services. My name is Keola Limkin. I am 24 years old and I am the Vice-President elect of the HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Board on O'ahu. HI H.O.P.E.S stands for Hawai'i Helping Our People Envision Success. The HI H.O.P.E.S Youth Leadership Boards provides the youth voice for the Hawai'i Youth Opportunities Initiative and serves as the Youth Advisory Council for DHS-Child Welfare Services. Our mission includes advocating for positive changes within the foster care system and to increase opportunities for young people transitioning from foster care to adulthood.

I would like to submit testimony in strong support of Senate Bill 2878. Although the Higher Educational Board Allowance, otherwise known as Higher Ed, provides a great opportunity for former foster youth, the eligibility timeline should be considerably extended. Youth who experience transitional placement during foster care undergo a number of traumatic experiences. Children in foster care also frequently change schools. With every new school, children have to start over with developing their social capital, which may consist of peers, teachers, counselors and coaches. To that matter, they may fall further and farther behind with their academic responsibilities. In addition, these children often experience higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems compared to the general population of young people. This impediment will likely lengthen the time it takes to complete their secondary school or equivalent.

As of now, these young people need to apply for Higher Ed by the age of 22. By extending the deadline to the age of 26 ½ other youth who have later become stable can further their education. These older youth may have needed extra time to find safe and affordable housing, improve their mental health, and develop a stronger network of social capital. With this extension, more young adults would be able to improve their skills and be positive influence in our society.

During my high school years, there was a time in which I would have had to change schools due to an address change. Fortunately I was able to remain at the same high school and continue to have connections with my best friend, school peers, teachers, and coaches. Since my best friend heavily influenced my passion to attend college early, I may not have registered for Higher Ed if I did not have his immediate support. Even though I took advantage of higher education at an early age, remaining a full time student was still a challenge. I had to diligently seek a behavioral mental health counselor to resolve some of my childhood trauma. Fortunately for me, I fully utilized Higher Ed and successfully completed my undergraduate studies. However, from personal experience I can tell that many other young adults aren't ready for a college program directly after high school.

As I come to a finish, I ask that you support new generations of foster youth by raising the age that former foster youth can apply for Higher Ed Allowances. Let's move forward with creating a stronger community and pass Senate Bill 2878. Thank you very much for your time.



To: Senate Committee on Human Services

From: Stephanie Kim, HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board (Oahu)

Re: Testimony in SUPPORT OF SB 2878

Aloha members of the Senate Committee on Human Services,

My name is Stephanie Kim, 21 years old, and I am a former foster youth who was in care for 6 years before emancipating at age 18. I am a board member of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth Leadership Board of the Hawaii Youth Opportunities Initiative on Oahu. HI H.O.P.E.S. stands for Hawaii Helping Our People Envision Success and we are comprised of current and former foster youth between the ages of 14 and 26. Our work includes educating others on the needs of foster youth, collaborating with community partners, and most importantly, advocating for current and former foster youth.

I would like to submit testimony in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 2878, which extends the deadline for former foster youth to apply for Higher Education stipends from their 21st birthday to 26 ½ years old. The bill finds that for many former foster youth readiness for higher education comes at a later age than 22 years old, therefore, extending the age to 26 ½ would give them more time to access higher education.

I find this statement in the bill to be very true and the very reason that the deadline for Higher Education to be extended. For many former foster youth, the main priority after aging out of foster care is to find stability. To obtain stability, many former foster youth have to obtain a full-time job in order to secure a place to live and food to eat. Accessing higher education might be the last thing on their mind, so by pushing the deadline, it allows youth to become stable in their lives and pursue a better career and opportunity through higher education.

For me, higher education has always been a part of my plan and I was lucky enough to have supporters in my life that helped me get to where I am today. If I wasn't so determined on pursuing a degree, it would have been nice to know that I could take time to figure out what I wanted to do before going into college without an idea in my head. Other youth should be given the opportunity to better themselves before pursuing future endeavors. That is why this bill will benefit them tremendously.

In closing, I would like to ask that Senate Bill 2878 be passed. This bill will extend the deadline of Higher Education stipends, which will allow former foster youth time to become ready for their future. Thank you.



From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
To: [HMS Testimony](#)
Cc: b.nagamine@hotmail.com
Subject: *Submitted testimony for SB2878 on Feb 16, 2016 13:25PM*
Date: Monday, February 15, 2016 12:29:30 AM

SB2878

Submitted on: 2/15/2016

Testimony for HMS on Feb 16, 2016 13:25PM in Conference Room 016

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Brianne Lyn Nagamine	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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Aloha! My name is Jamie Kai and I work with Hale Opio Kauai. Hale Opio is dedicated to improving the quality of life, enhancing a sense of belonging, increasing self-awareness, and strengthening Ohana. We do this through residential and community programs for education, prevention, diversions, and treatment. My role at Hale Opio includes managing several different programs that serve current and former foster youth, primarily ages 14-26.

I would like to submit testimony in support of Senate Bill 2878 which raises the age to first apply for Higher Ed payments from 22 to 26 ½. Increasing the time for foster youth to apply for higher education stipends may help improve their life chances and ability to contribute to society as productive adults.

Children in foster care experience rates of emotional and behavioral problems impacting their education that are higher than their peers not been involved in the child welfare system. Recent data shows that young people ages 23 and 24 that were formerly in foster care experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder at six times the general population rate and double the rate of veterans returning from war. Aging out of the foster care system is tough! It takes time for these young adults to heal and mature, some more time than others. The extra 4 years this bill would allow can be a significant impact for some of these young adults.

During my first year with Hale Opio, I was approached by a former foster youth who wanted to pursue college. He was seeking opportunities and financial assistance as he had a sister who was able to take utilize higher education payments. He told me his story about how he struggled with drugs and the death of a close family member for the first several years of his adult life. He explained how it was always a goal to go to college but he was never physically or emotionally ready until now. It saddened me to tell him he was ineligible to receive higher education payments because he was 24 years old.

In closing, I ask that you support our young adults coming out of foster care by increasing the time for former foster youth to apply for higher education stipends. I ask that this committee please pass Bill 2878. Thank you for your time.

To: Senate Committee on Human Services, February 16, 2016

From: Sarah Smith

Re: In SUPPORT of SB 2878

My name is Sarah Smith. I'm a former foster youth that aged out of Rhode Island's foster care system, and now, I'm a Hale Kipa Case Manager. I work with young people receiving Higher Ed Board Payments, and those in Imua Kakou. For these reasons, I'm very excited about SB 2878. Extending the age of first use for Higher Ed is crucial in allowing former foster youth the opportunity to be productive, well rounded members of society. Many typical 18 year olds are not ready to go to college – never mind those that aged out of foster care! It is not unusual for an 18 year old foster youth to still be working towards finishing high school. I have multiple youth on my caseload that are over age 18 and do not yet have a high school diploma or GED. Why is this? Youth in foster care change schools and get held back at higher rates than youth in healthy families with no foster care history. Youth in foster care also have so much going on in their lives outside of school that it can be difficult to focus on finishing high school, never mind preparing for college. While the 4 years they currently have between 18 and 22 may seem long to some, in the face of all the adversity these kids face, that time is gone in the blink of an eye. Extending the age of first use for Higher Ed gives those with more obstacles extra time to find their way to college, and gives them the support they need to complete college once they get there.

Letting young adults with active CWS cases remain in Imua Kakou will be a game changer. We all know that former foster youth are having children younger, and at a higher rate, than youth in healthy families with no foster care history. We also know that most people, foster care involved or not, learn their parenting skills from their own parents. It is unfortunate that some former foster youth parent their children the way they were parented – the way that got them removed from their own parents. However, removing services from the young adult with their own CWS history, who also happens to be a parent, goes against the way that CWS is supposed to work. Typically when you have a parent that has their children taken away, what does CWS do? They send a social worker in and give the parent a lot of support and services to try and reunify them with their child. So why are we taking away services when a young adult with their own foster care history ends up in the same position as their parents did? Clearly, this young adult is struggling to safely parent even with the support of Imua Kakou. We should be giving them extra supportive services to help them get their kids back – not being punitive and taking away the only support that they have.