



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS
HONOLULU

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR

April 1, 2019

TO: The Honorable Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Scott Morishige, MSW, Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness

SUBJECT: **SCR 62 – REQUESTING THE GOVERNOR'S COORDINATOR ON HOMELESSNESS AND THE CITY AND COUNTY OF HONOLULU TO COME TOGETHER AND PRIORITIZE THEIR HOMELESS EFFORTS IN THE AREA SURROUNDING THE HAWAII CHILDREN'S DISCOVERY CENTER BY CONVENING A TASK FORCE**

Hearing: Monday, April 1, 2019, 10:20 a.m.
Conference Room 211, State Capitol

POSITION: The Governor's Coordinator appreciates the intent of this measure, and respectfully offers comments.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this concurrent resolution is to request the Coordinator and the City and County of Honolulu to come together and prioritize their homeless efforts in the area surrounding the Hawaii Children's Discovery Center by convening a task force.

The Coordinator acknowledges that homelessness is a statewide issue that impacts every county. The Hawaii Interagency Council on Homelessness (HICH), which includes participation by the Coordinator and the City & County of Honolulu, has adopted a comprehensive framework to address homelessness that focuses on three primary leverage points – affordable housing, health and human services, and public safety. The Coordinator works closely with State and County agencies and law enforcement to connect trespass and other enforcement efforts together with the offer of services and housing-focused programs, such as Housing First and Rapid Re-Housing. The coordinated efforts to implement the State's framework to address homelessness have made progress in reducing the number of homeless individuals statewide. Between 2017 and 2018, the number of homeless individuals in Hawaii

decreased by 690 individuals (9.6%). The decrease was one of the largest numeric decreases in homelessness in the country, only exceeded by decreases in California, Florida and Michigan. This recent decrease is the second consecutive decrease in homelessness in Hawaii – representing an overall 18% reduction since 2016.

In Kakaako Makai, the State assists with programs for emergency shelter, outreach, and Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD). Specifically, the Department of Human Services (DHS) administers two emergency shelters to address the needs of homeless individuals and families – the Family Assessment Center (FAC) and Next Step shelter. In addition, the Kalihi-Palama Health Center and the Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center (H3RC) conduct outreach regularly in the area, which includes offers of shelter, housing, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and medical services. The University of Hawaii John A. Burns School of Medicine (JABSOM) also administers the H.O.M.E. Project, which provides mobile medical services at Kakaako Waterfront Park every Thursday evening from 5:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

One example of collaboration with the City & County of Honolulu in Kakaako Makai is the partnership between the Coordinator and the Honolulu Police Department (HPD) HELP Honolulu program. HELP Honolulu pairs HPD officers with State-contracted outreach providers who participate in coordinated outreach efforts that place individuals into emergency shelter or other longer-term placements (e.g. residential treatment, medical respite, etc.) with the assistance of the Coordinator and staff. A recent HPD HELP coordinated outreach effort resulted in the placement of 12 individuals into emergency shelter, and one individual to a residential treatment facility.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



March 30, 2019

To: The Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Re: Testimony for SCR 62

Children's museums play a significant role in promoting lifelong learning and serve as important cultural resources within the community. Our Children's Discovery Center is the first and only children's museum in the State of Hawaii. The Center's mission is: 1) to educate and inspire children in an exciting, world-class learning environment filled with hands-on, interactive exhibits where families can learn and grow together through purposeful play and, 2) to instill in Hawaii's children pride in themselves and their ethnic and cultural heritage.

Children's museums across the country are vitally important to children in the communities that they serve. Through galleries of hands-on, interactive exhibits, children and adults can learn together through play, which is an important and the most natural way that children learn. In the adult world, we use words like "experiment," "investigate," and "hypothesize." Here, we use words like "explore," "discover," "imagine" and "dream." In a children's museum, our exhibits are designed and built for that purpose. They also allow children to use their imagination and creativity to discover things while exploring the environment around them. Here we "teach" by nurturing and empowering children ... while they are having fun and playing. What better way could there possibly be to learn!

As an Island State, Hawaii is geographically isolated from the rest of the United States and the world. For many children, this means that their personal experiences and impressions about the world beyond our island shores are limited to what is available to them within the State and what they learn or read about in school. In order to broaden their horizons and open new and wonderful worlds to them, a facility such as a children's museum is especially important to Hawaii's children.

Located across from the Kaka'ako Waterfront Park in downtown Honolulu, the Center consists of 45,000 square feet of interactive exhibits within five major galleries. It is a popular visitor attraction for families with children of all ages and a place where they can experience, explore, investigate and discover things about themselves and the world around them in a creative and fun environment where they are learning through play. Of the 125,000 visitors that come each year, 15% are in school group visits and, of this group, close to 50% come from rural areas on Oahu and the neighbor islands.

Over the past ten years, we have experienced extreme hardships due to the encampments that surrounded the perimeter of our building. For years now, an inordinate amount of our financial resources have had to be allocated for maintenance and repair issues because of trespassing, vandalism and theft on our property. Also, the area is overrun with feral cats and chickens, unleashed dogs, mosquitoes, and now rats! While the number of tents fronting the Center may be somewhat reduced, it fluctuates daily, and there are more aggressive and even some violent individuals coming onto our property now. As a result, we are finally grappling with the possibility of securing our property with fencing, hiring 24 hr. security, and replacing the damaged security cameras around the perimeter of our building as deterrents. With limited financial resources, we have been committed to trying to "do more with less" so that we do not compromise the high quality of our exhibits and educational programs.

Sadly, the Center continues to experience many challenges, which we believe are not conducive to the health, safety and welfare of our young audience. We recognize and appreciate the coordinated efforts by the city and state, together with social service agencies and health care providers over the years, however, there still does not seem to be any long-term solution to this problem in sight. We know that the process of restoring Kaka'ako Park and the area will be challenging and complicated. We also know that it will be difficult for the Children's Discovery Center to recover from the conditions that we have endured over the past many years.

Helping the homeless and finding solutions to alleviate problems associated with homelessness is a major and complex challenge, but progress on addressing this issue is critically needed. While we are certainly sympathetic to those who are in need of help, the homeless encampments surrounding the Center have had severe repercussions for the Children's Discovery Center and other stakeholders in the Kaka'ako Makai area over the past many years. Unfortunately, we are seeing this problem intensifying once again. The issues that we've been subjected over the past ten years have been physically, mentally and emotionally devastating. Trespassing, vandalism, theft, and all kinds of harassment have been bad enough; but equally frustrating, has been the inability for law enforcement to intervene effectively, due to the complexities regarding jurisdiction in this area. Clearly, there is no easy solution to the problem of homelessness and, as I have stated publicly many times, that is NOT what this is about. What it IS about is our children.

It is so important to us for the Children's Discovery Center to be a wonderful safe haven for all families with children who are eager to come here to play and to learn. Our staff has been extraordinarily dedicated to providing outstanding educational programs for those who continue to come because they love the Center and benefit from our programs. To continue serving them we need help in addressing the problems that exist in the area around Kaka'ako park and the Children's Discovery Center.

We are unsure whether it will even be possible for us to recover fully from some of the challenges we experienced that were beyond our control, but ones that may continue to plague us for a long time to come. We have stepped up our efforts to ensure that the Center continues to be a safe and clean environment so that the families who use and love the Center can continue to be inspired by the programs and learning opportunities that our staff works so hard to develop. Drawing from our mission and our purpose, combined with a philosophy which is deeply rooted in the spirit of Aloha, we continue to focus on the children.

The Hawaii Children's Discovery Center continues to serve as a model for the creation of children's museums throughout China today. The first one opened in Beijing in 2015 and the second one will celebrate a grand opening in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia this year. Presently, we are supporting efforts to develop children's gallery spaces in traditional museums throughout China for early learners, starting with a science museum in Shanghai. Hopefully, one day our government officials will take pride in the fact that our children's museum in Hawaii served as the original inspiration for this entire movement. While these are challenging times, we now have the unique opportunity to step up and become strong advocates for our children on a global scale. In the foyer of our Discovery Center the children of Hawaii are described as "Hawaii's Rainbow Connection to the world." We must put our efforts into working together to prepare them to navigate their world and to live and lead with their hearts filled with Aloha.

Loretta Yajima
Chair of the Board of Directors & CEO
Hawaii Children's Discovery Center
111 Ohe Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

SCR-62-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2019 9:24:10 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2019 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Valerie Okihara	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

As a retired Hawai`i public school teacher and administrator who volunteers monthly at the Hawai`i Children's Discovery Center (HCDC), I support SCR62. A task force of State and City officials, HCDC representative and other community members will be able to work together on solutions and coordinate efforts to ensure the safety and health of the area surrounding the center. Although statewide there are improvements and progress in homelessness, efforts in the HCDC area have been ineffective, temporary and fragmented with the State and City working separately and disagreeing on jurisdiction. For a while after a recent voluntary clean-up by a group of civic-minded homeless, the area felt safe. However, there are already campers moving in again and the HCDC has been affected by criminal incidents.

The Hawai`i Children's Discovery Center provides an enriching and fun environment where Hawai`i's keiki develop language and critical thinking skills which are the foundations for literacy and life-long learning. It also provides experiences and background knowledge which may not be available directly such as viewing x-rays of their bones in a "doctor's office" and a "visit to Asian countries" from which their ancestors may have come. While interacting with others, children develop life skills such as cooperation and concern for others. Parents learn with their children and strengthen positive bonds. Thousands of Hawai`i's children, including those living in disadvantaged areas, also come to the center on field trips at a lower cost funded by grants.

Some current strategies may be improved without additional funds. The task force can discuss how to make strategies more effective and long lasting through coordination, clarification of jurisdiction and perhaps elimination of efforts which do not work. If additional funds are needed, the money will be spent on well thought out strategies which will work. Making the area safe with a cohesive plan will benefit not only the center and Hawai`i's keiki but also community members who enjoy the park, go to the John Burns Medical School, and do business in the area. Solutions should also provide help for the homeless currently camping in the area.

Please vote "yes" on SCR62. The Hawai`i Children's Discovery Center is a valuable educational resource. The creation of a task force will be a first step toward positive solutions to ensure the health and safety in the area.

Thank you for taking time to read this testimony and for your consideration of this resolution which could impact the future of the Hawai'i Children's Discovery Center.

Valerie Okihara

Thank you for the opportunity to give input on SCR62.

I support SCR62 which urges the State and City and County to work together to prioritize homeless efforts in the area surrounding the Hawai'i Children's Discovery Center by convening a task force.

As an retired educator, I have volunteered at the Center witnessing and participating in many varied activities. It was always a joy to see the children experiencing different areas and activities available. Yes, they were having fun, but equally important, they were learning. Toddlers to older children enjoyed and learned. One special memory for me -- I chaperoned a group of neighbor island 6th graders on their Oahu trip. Because it was a hands-on experience and interactive place, the Children's Discovery Center was a favorite place. And, the adults also loved it because it was a safe place, then.

The Children's Discover Center is the only uniquely children's museum in Honolulu that I know of. So, it matters greatly when this community learning place is affected adversely. I have witnessed so much joy in the children's playing and positive incidental learning that I need to speak up in support of this wonderful place with its wonderful, committed leaders and staff. They have created a program that meets the needs of the children/community.

On another note, with early education initiatives coming up, we will indeed need places which focus on programs and activities for the young. The Center has that. So the Center needs support now. We ask for your support.

Mahalo and With warm aloha.

Myrna Nishihara

SCR-62-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2019 5:09:33 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2019 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Daisy Ishihara	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Hawaii Children’s Discovery Center (HCDC) is a state-of the-art children’s museum, serving the keiki of Hawaii by promoting lifelong learning in a safe and nurturing environment. Children learn through their senses exploring, discovering, imagining and dreaming about themselves through hands-on activities as they visit the five galleries, Fantastic You, Your Town, Hawaiian Rainbow, Your Rainbow World and the Rainforest Adventure.

HCDC further promotes special educational programs for school children, camp programs during school breaks, weekly programs for toddlers and preschoolers and special occurrences celebrating certain holidays and events. These valuable educational resources enrich both children and adults in a fun and exciting way!

Getting to HCDC is the problem, and has been one for too many years. The issues which stem from the exposure to unsanitary encampments can be detrimental to the success of the HCDC. One may see the people in encampments displaying unhealthy habits not appropriate for young children, littering, and vandalizing. This environment also creates unsafe parking lot conditions which create panic in both local and tourist visitors. The anxiety in the visitors ultimately prevents visitation to this one of a kind museum, the HCDC.

As a retired educator and a volunteer at HCDC for eighteen years, I see the value in saving HCDC from the many challenges they face with the encampments. I am in favor of SCR 62 on addressing the homeless efforts around Hawaii Children’s Discovery Center. This is the right decision on a problem that has existed for too long. Please ACT now!

Thank you for your consideration,

Daisy Ishihara

SCR-62-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2019 4:35:14 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2019 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Betty Y Yoshida	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I support SCR62 and urge the State of Hawaii and the City & County of Honolulu to prioritize their homelessness efforts in the area surrounding the Hawaii Children's Discovery Center by convening a task force. As a parent and a former public school teacher, I have only praise for the educational program that the Center offers. "Look...See...Do" is how a toddler's mother described their recent visit. The quality of the interactive exhibits and the wide array of learning areas - in health, environment, the arts, local cultures, community workers, and more - make the Children's Discovery Center a unique and first rate children's museum. Legislators, if you have not visited the Center when it is full of children, then you have missed out on witnessing early childhood education at its best! That it has maintained its program in the Kakaako location for over 20 years is a testament to the hard work of the staff, its generous donors, the many school visitors, and volunteers. That it will continue to do so in the future will depend on your wisdom and kokua.

I truly sympathize with the plight of the homeless and plead with you to expedite a strategy, a humane solution that defines Aloha for all. Mahalo nui loa.

SCR-62-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2019 6:21:03 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2019 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Candace Yanagihara	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

As a retired educator of over 30+ years, a parent, a grandparent, and a concerned citizen, I feel definitely qualified to say that the Hawaii Children's Discovery Center is a key educational facility that fosters learning in even the youngest of our children. Not only do the children learn, but parents, the children's first teachers, have a venue with a myriad of hands-on experiences which stimulate their children's learning and social interactions. Parent involvement in a child's education is one of the keys to a child's success in school.....and HCDC fosters just that kind of parent-child interaction.

As a PAL (People Assisting Learning) volunteer at HCDC for over 10 years, I have seen firsthand the joy and excitement of children (my own 4 grandchildren as well) as they enter the facility and as they engage in the learning environment. Even parents who are coming for the first time are in awe of what the Center provides. HCDC provides learning opportunities weekly for the different age groups from toddler and preschoolers to learning camps (usually filled with a wait list) during school breaks, as well as visits by public and private schools. While I served as a PAL, I've had visitors to our island tell me that they don't have anything like it where they live.

It is such a shame that the situation surrounding the Hawaii Children's Discovery Center is a health and safety issue. How can it be that we cannot protect the areas that our keiki visit and learn in? How can it be that families are reluctant to visit such a place built for families to learn together because they do not feel it is a safe place for their children and themselves?

I strongly feel that if there are laws prohibiting loitering/trespassing for schools, then there should also be the same laws/safe zones for wherever large groups of children congregate regularly.

Sincerely submitted and hopeful for a resolution to the health and safety issues surrounding Hawaii Children's Discovery Center,

Candace Yanagihara

LATE

SCR-62-SD-1

Submitted on: 4/1/2019 7:12:48 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2019 10:20:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Ryan Tam	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keigh-Agaran, and Senators-

As an individual, I strongly support SCR62, SD1.

The Kaka'ako makai area has a great potential to become another great civic space for Honolulu. Developing a comprehensive, long-term strategy to address the large homeless encampments in this area is an important step in this process. The community could leverage the success of the Children's Discovery Center in developing this area.

I would also like to note that the Ala Moana-Kaka'ako Neighborhood Board recently heard about the concerns of the homeless around the Children's Discovery Center, and Board members are interested in working on this issue in more depth. Board members are also generally very concerned about resolving the homeless issues throughout Kaka'ako.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely Yours,

Ryan Tam

Chair, Ala Moana-Kaka'ako Neighborhood Board No. 11