



*The Judiciary, State of Hawai'i*

**Testimony to the Thirty-First Legislature, 2021 Regular Session**

**Senate Committee on Ways and Means**  
Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair

Thursday, April 1, 2021, 9:30 a.m.  
State Capitol  
VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

by

Judge Christine E. Kuriyama  
Senior Judge, Deputy Chief Judge  
Family Court of the First Circuit

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY**

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**Bill No. and Title:** House Bill No. 835, H.D.2, Relating to the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy

**Purpose:** Appropriates funds to support the ongoing operations of the Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Program. Effective 7/1/3050 (HD2)

**Judiciary's Position:**

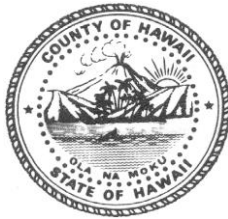
The Judiciary offers the following testimony in support of the bill:

1. The Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Academy ("Youth Challenge") is a community-based program that provides and teaches life changing structure, education, values, and skills for "at promise" youth throughout the state of Hawai'i.
2. Youth Challenge has been a valuable partner of the Family Court across all islands. It provides the necessary services to divert "at promise" youth from the juvenile justice system and also serves as a much needed alternative to detention.
3. Based upon the foregoing, the Judiciary respectfully requests that the Legislature appropriate the necessary funds to support this essential program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

**KELDEN B.A. WALTJEN**  
PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

**STEPHEN L. FRYE**  
FIRST DEPUTY  
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## **OFFICE OF THE PROSECUTING ATTORNEY**

### **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 835 HD2**

#### **A BILL RELATING TO THE NATIONAL GUARD YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY**

#### **COMMITTEE ON WAYS AND MEANS**

Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senator Gilbert Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair  
Thursday, April 1, 2021 at 9:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference

Honorable Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Keith-Agaran and Members of the Committee on Ways and Means The Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, County of Hawai'i submits the following testimony in support of House Bill No. 835 HD2.

The Hawai'i National Guard Youth Challenge Academy Hilo Campus (Youth Challenge) is the only public residential educational institution on the island of Hawai'i for youth (ages 16-18). The mission of Youth Challenge is to intervene in and reclaim the lives of "at promise" youth, producing program graduates with the values, life skills, education, and self-discipline necessary to succeed as productive citizens. In addition to getting a diploma, youth are educated and trained in the Eight Core Components of the academy's foundation including Academic Excellence, Life Coping Skills, Job Skills, Health & Hygiene, Responsible Citizenship, Service to Community, Leadership, and Physical Fitness. These components help mold these young men and women to be successful and contributing members to society.

Youth Challenge benefits our community in many ways. This award-winning program has been recognized as one of the nation's most effective and cost-efficient programs for targeting youth who are at the greatest risk for substance abuse, teen pregnancy, delinquency, and criminal activity. Youth Challenge performs tens of thousands of volunteer work hours to benefit communities around the island providing the youth the opportunity to learn the value of public service and become stewards of their community. Youth Challenge is a key supporter and participates alongside numerous other organizations, non-profit partners, and labor unions in the semi-annual Nā Leo O Nā 'Ōpio Career Opportunities Expo, which is one of the longest running and largest career fairs on the island, supporting over two thousand youth grades 5-12 from across the island.

Continued funding for this program is necessary. Hundreds of youth who did not succeed in traditional forms of education succeeded with the help of Youth Challenge. The County of Hawai'i Office of the Prosecuting Attorney supports the passage of House Bill No. 835 HD2 and

the ongoing operations of Youth Challenge. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this matter.

**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 3:50:55 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Cory Nicolas	Testifying for Family Tree Project LLP	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha,

My name is Cory Nicolas, Licensed Mental Health Counselor. I am also the owner of Family Tree Project LLP. We are a private practice and have partnered with the Hawaii National Guard to provide mental health services for both campuses of the Youth Challenge Academy since 2015. The Hilo campus is unique in so many ways. The staff go above and beyond for the cadets because they feel it is always the right thing to do. I have seen with my own eyes how much the staff dedicates their time and energy to helping each cadet become successful. Over the years, most of the cadets will tell us (as counselors) that they are having fun and enjoying being in the program. This is a direct reflection of the staff and the environment they create.

I can produce pages of evidence on the dedication and caring that is displayed by the staff and expressed by the cadets. However, my intent of this testimony is to express my concern over the projected increase of disparities that will be caused if the State is unable to sustain one of the biggest resources in the community.

Adverse Childhood Experience (ACES) are potential traumatic events that happen in a child between ages 0-17 (CDC, 2020). These events have a significant impact on brain development, emotional regulation, impulse control, anxiety, depression, and many other health disparities. When assessed, the higher the ACES score (0-9), the higher the risk of serious disparities. Family Tree Project assesses each cadet every class. Historically (for Hilo campus), 100% of the population scores at a 3 or higher in ACES. To break it down even further, an average percentage of cadets scoring 6 or higher is 75%. The average percentage scoring 9 or higher (which basically answered yes to every question about experiencing and/or exposure to trauma), is 10%.

Another concerning statistic is that out of the female population, 80% of them have experienced some sort of sexual trauma in their lives. Out of that 80%, half of them were assaulted by a family member in the household. The neighbor island population tends to feel isolated and stuck, as resources are limited. They either believe that what has happen to them or what continues to happen to them is normal and exactly how their lives should be. They believe that nothing will ever change for them, until they come to Youth Challenge. The scariest statistic that I can provide today, is that out of the entire population over the years, an average of 90% have never been in therapy or sought services on their own. Within the island exists a high risk population that is exposed to unsafe environments that have become their norm. They never felt safe enough to talk to someone and seek therapy to work through their trauma. For the first time in their lives, they have the choice to work through their trauma and the everyday frustrations and fears in a safe and therapeutic environment. The process of building trust takes a little longer, but consistency with being in a residential facility helps break down the walls.

Youth Challenge doesn't just teach kids discipline, they create a different option for a future. Most of these kids never believed options were even possible. Youth Challenge in partnership with Family Tree Project also provides an opportunity for each cadet to heal (in their own time) from their emotional scars and remove the obstacles that have kept them stagnant. Services from Family Tree Project are offered after graduation if needed. Our state is currently in a middle of a mental health crisis. In these dark times, we should be seeding the community with more resources rather than bleeding it.



March 30, 2021

Testimony in support of: HB 835

Submitted by:  
Ho'ōla Nā Pua

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and honorable committee members,

Ho'ōla Nā Pua is in support of appropriating funding to continue operations of the Hawaii National Guard Youth Challenge Program.

Ho'ōla Nā Pua has been providing weekly group sessions to the female cadets at Youth Challenge since 2019. The incredible team at Youth Challenge invites us in just after week 5 of program acclimation and we provide services until program completion, or the youth's graduation ceremony.

Prior to the decision to close the YCA campus, we were in conversations with leadership about expanding our services to the male cadets at Youth Challenge, which would provide anti-trafficking education to a population often overlooked in the fight against exploitation.

As a service provider that works with at-risk and exploited youth at multiple other locations statewide, we cannot emphasize enough the benefits of this program for the cadets who enter Youth Challenge.

Our connection to Youth Challenge Academy (YCA) is important to us, as the youth who are there often have multiple risk factors and vulnerabilities that make them susceptible to sex trafficking. In conjunction with the YCA curriculum, our weekly sessions help to ensure the youth present build their self-worth and identity, social and safety skills, and help to guide them towards a life purpose or goal.



*We are committed to the prevention of sex trafficking and providing care for children who have been exploited.*

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Ho'ōla Nā Pua  
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The program that we offer at YCA applies concepts that appreciate the culture, languages, traditions, and socio-economic factors in Hawaii. Lessons incorporate ways that the youth can cultivate their own protective factors in a space that is non-judgmental, non-shaming, and without fearmongering, an important balance to the rigorous demands of the Academy.

YCA is an important facility for Hawaii and Maui county communities. It provides an opportunity for youth to excel in an alternative environment and explore post-secondary opportunities, and offers diversion for many youth who, without YCA, could end up at the Oahu Detention Home or Youth Correctional Facility.

YCA is a meaningful place for youth to learn and grow. We are so grateful for our partnership there and urge the Committee to provide appropriations so that it stays open for many years to come.

Respectfully,  
Ho'ōla Nā Pua



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**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 6:37:51 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
frederick a.nitta, md, inc	Testifying for Frederick A. Nitta, M.D., Inc.	Support	No

Comments:

Dear WAM Committee,

Please help our community by passing this bill. I am probably one of the few physicians in Hawaii that directly deals with addiction, abuse, and criminal activities as a result of a failure of our system to successfully address problems in our youth. There is not a day that goes by that I do not see dozens of hard core addicts trying to get clean. The Youth Challenge in Hilo is just a small part of successfully trying to redirect our youth. It works. Why eliminate one of the few things that actually does work. I implore you to help get this bill passed. I also respectfully challenge all politicians to do more to stop the addiction, crime, and homelessness that has taken over our home, HAWAII.

Sincerely,

Dr. Frederick A. Nitta, M.D., Inc.,



**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/25/2021 6:36:32 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Mike Vincent	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Keith-Agaran, and members of the Committee:

I strongly support full funding of the Hawaii National Guard Youth CHalleNGe Academy.

The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds to support the operation of the Youth CHalleNGe Academy.

Everyone understands that budgets are tight but full funding the Youth CHalleNGe Academy should rank very high on the Legislature's funding priorities because it is absolutely the best program in Hawaii to help our at promise youth (most call them at-risk) for a much lower cost than any other program funded or supported by the Legislature. There is no other program in Hawaii more successful in helping at promise youth and there is no program that is more economical to the taxpayers of the state,

Most of the youth entering the Academy are statistically destined for a life of struggles; failure; social, family, and employment difficulties; poverty; substance abuse; or prison. Many have been written off by society and those around them who have given up on them. Virtually all of the cadets are repeatedly in trouble of various degrees, many have been arrested, and some of them have spent time in youth correctional facilities. All of them have one thing in common-they see themselves as nothing but a failure in many ways, have no vision of a bright and positive future, have no idea who or what they can become, or that they have the potential to be truly great in all they do. They come to the program hobbled with the chains of a slave burdened with baggage filled with trials, challenges, and pain. The program frees them, gives them the gift of vision, helps them see their true potential, and gives them the tools to overcome any challenge and succeed in all they do. If they can dream it, they can believe it, and they can achieve it.

The program has an unmatched success rate of over 90% of the cadets who successfully graduate and complete the program. There is no program, club, church, or organization of any type that is more successful than the Youth CHalleNGe Academy at helping these youth see that they are in control of their future, that they determine who and what they will become, and most importantly that they have the capabilities to be greater than they will ever see themselves. The benefits of this program to these youth, their families, their friends, our community, and anyone who comes in contact with any

graduate throughout their lives are immeasurable and incalculable as the benefits from this single program exponentially impact generations for each graduate.

From a fiscal standpoint, supporting full funding of the Youth CHalleNGe Academy makes complete sense. This program is a no-cost program to participants and their families, but the real benefit to the taxpayer is the majority of the program costs are provided by the United States Department of Defense on a 75% federal and 25% State matching basis. In short, the taxpayers only need to fund 25% of the costs of the program. The Legislature funds various programs to benefit the community and youth struggling with challenges of life, but none of them come close to the economic benefit of funding the Youth CHalleNGe Academy. This benefit goes far beyond the costs of the Program when the immeasurable benefits are taken into consideration.

I have had the privilege of association with this program from its inception and early days in Waimanalo. There is no better program in Hawaii and the Hawaii Youth CHalleNGe Academy is one of the best in the country. I strongly support full Legislative support of funding for the Youth CHalleNGe Academy so that the Department of Defense can have full resources to operate and determine the full future of the program.

Mahalo for your thoughtful consideration and the opportunity to provide these comments.

**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/29/2021 11:11:02 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
John D. Smith	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I support

TO: Senator Takashi Ohno, Chair

Senator Sonny Ganaden, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Corrections, Military and Veterans

RE: HB 835 HD2, Relating to the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy

FROM: Mariah Maniulit, Thompson School of Social Work Graduate Student

DATE: April 1, 2021 at 09:30AM; CR 211 & Videoconference

Good morning Chair Ohno, Vice Chair Ganaden, and members of the Committee on Corrections, Military and Veterans:

My name is Mariah Maniulit and I am currently a Masters of Social Work Candidate at University of Hawai'i's School of Social Work. Today, I declare this testimony in **support** of HB835 HD2.

Working with the houseless population during my undergraduate Social Work practicum studies, I learned the importance of the foundations of education, mentorship, and personal discipline that usually comes with the formative years of a traditional high school education. While that route might not be as accessible to all, the Hawaii Youth Challenge program allows for some teens to have another chance of obtaining their goals as well as accruing life skills that one will remember for a lifetime. While houselessness is still possible after this program, I have seen firsthand that clients who have graduated from the Hawaii Youth Challenge program have more resilience and refer back to their program as we assisted them to rehabilitating back to a safer lifestyle. With funds appropriated to the Hawaii Youth Challenge program for the following fiscal year, it could only be assumed that those funds will go to assisting the youth who had their high school goals derailed due to the tumultuous times of COVID. Now, more

than ever, programs such as the Hawaii Youth Challenge program need the support of our state and its citizens.

I appreciate your time and consideration with this testimony in support of HB 835 HD2 as well as your thoughtful attention to the safety and wellbeing of the future of Hawai'i.

Respectfully,  
Mariah Maniulit  
Masters of Social Work Candidate  
mmaniul@hawaii.edu

March 29, 2021

**Chair Donovan M. Dela Cruz**  
**Vice Chair Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran**

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**Re: HB 835 RELATING TO THE NATIONAL GUARD YOUTH CHALLENGE ACADEMY.**

Dear Chair, Donovan M. Dela Cruz.,

Aloha. My name is Lehuanani Huddleston-Hafoka, from Kihei, Maui. I am submitting this written testimony on behalf of my husband, Pouono Hafoka Sr., our family, and myself.

**In support of HB 835, relating to the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy, I humbly ask that the funding is granted to continue this life-saving program.**

“Life-saving” is the best way that I can describe what this program was to my son, Pouono Hafoka, Jr. I can certainly say that with the continuum of funding for NGYCA, many more lives of our teens will be saved by instilling a “sense of purpose” in their lives. Our kids deserve this opportunity, and it has shown its promise.

Unmotivated and somewhat frustrated at himself in early 2017, our then 16-year-old son told us that he wanted to go to the National Guard Youth Challenge Academy. After attending the orientation that was held on Maui a few weeks later, he was off to the Hilo NGYCA. Best decision in his life – ever!

Not one to do any public speaking nor having any desire to partake in any real form of leadership or student government activities, Pouono Boy, as he is affectionately known, graduated as Class President, Commencement Speaker, and the recipient of the Adjutant General Leadership Award for Class 2017-02 (14) on December 20, 2017.

He came back a changed young man, to say the least. He was healthier in mind, body and spirit. He had found himself. He now had a “sense of purpose.” He obtained his high school diploma, of which was the main goal for him. He was able to take the

ASVAB test as he was interested in enlisting in the Marines. He had to take it several times to reach the score that enabled him to qualify. The teachable moment in this situation is that he never gave up. Upon each failed ASVAB test result, he tried harder. He studied harder. He was committed. He made it! Sworn in on March 5, 2018 as a recruit for the United States Marines. His diligence to reach yet another goal accomplished.

We could see the transformation right before our eyes. NGYCA instilled essential life-skills that we could see him applying to his daily life: respect for self and respect for others. Self-discipline, Accountability. Leadership. Followship. Resiliency. Time-management. Organization. And the list goes on. Regardless of our “parental efforts,” it certainly “takes a village to raise a child” and we are forever grateful for NGYCA and all that they provided our son.

The program’s mission is spot on. Everything that it says it does, is true! And the program not only affects the graduates, but it also affects families and community. It is a worthy investment, and it compliments every other formal and informal educational opportunities for our teens. Traditional school is not for everyone and teens learn and thrive in different learning environments; our son just so happen to have thrived in the setting of the Hilo NGYCA. The entire program staff was amazing.

Our hearts were so overwhelmed with joy as we were pleasantly surprised that Pouono received the distinction of “Honor Graduate” at his Marine Recruit Training graduation in August of 2018 as well as earning the Platoon Leader position for 3254 Lima Company 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. HE earned all of this. He applied everything that he learned in his life up until that day. The good, the bad, the ugly. At age 20, it has shaped his life thus far. He is now a Corporal in the United States Marines, stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, already on his second deployment.

Two profound statements my son said to me that I hang onto as it was so poignant: While at NGYCA, “I am going to run for class president and if I don’t make it, it will be okay, but I am going to try anyway” and then while in boot camp at MCRD, he said, “I am going to try my best to be the platoon leader, and if not, I’ll be okay, but I am going to try anyway.” All we can ask of our children and expect of ourselves, each and every day is to at least try and if we do not succeed, try and try again and if there are no more chances, like the two scenarios, it’s okay, at least “I tried anyway.” And to be realistic to know that life may not always be perfect, not all people may believe in us, not everything we want is going to go our way, but to be resilient, steadfast and to have a “sense of purpose” is what our teens need. Navigating life today is far more challenging then ever before and if it were not for National Guard Youth Challenge Academy, our son, Pouono Hafoka Jr. may not have known that he had it in him all that time, but it was there, at the Hilo National Guard Youth Challenge Academy that it was found. His time there was so profound that everything he learned is being applied today and will be with him for the rest of his life. For all the “Pouono Boy’s” out there, **please approve the appropriations for HB 835.** It really will help save lives. Mahalo nui loa.

**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 6:43:23 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
BREEANI LEE	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Please allow us to keep this wonderful program for our disadvantaged youth.

They need it and we need it

Our community need it

mahalo



**HB-835-HD-2**

Submitted on: 3/30/2021 8:19:17 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/1/2021 9:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Robert Stivers-Apiki	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I support HB 835 HD2

The Hilo Youth Challenge Program develops the 20 Developmental Assets (Search Institute) youth at-risk needs to be productive adult citizens of Hawaii and our country. The more assets a youth has the more likely he/she will not be involved in substance abuse, violence or gangs.

It is best we invest in prevention model programs and Youth Challenge is the ideal and has proven to be successful in developing resilient youth. Incarceration of Hawaii's young people is not only costly but it destroys Hawaii's greatest asset, the family.

Thank you for your time and serious consideration.