

MidWeek

Women's Caucus Strives For Compassion In Law

September 14, 2011
By Cynthia Thielen



As co-chairwomen of the Women's Legislative Caucus for the state House, Reps. Cynthia Thielen (left) and Marilyn Lee also assisted this spring on the group's Easter gifts to IHS. Photo from Cynthia Thielen.

For more than 20 years, the Women's Legislative Caucus has worked diligently to improve the lives of Hawaii's women and their families. Including state lawmakers from both the House and Senate, the Women's Caucus annually drafts and submits its package of bills with the goal of remedying key problems facing women and their families today.

Our caucus dedicates its package of bills each year to a woman who exemplifies its mission. This year, we chose Dr. Tricia Wright, the founder and pioneer of The Path Clinic. Dr. Wright and her team have taken on the daunting task of helping pregnant women trapped in addiction. These women often have nowhere else to turn, and Dr. Wright works to help them deliver a healthy baby in a dignified and compassionate environment.

Along these lines, for the 2011 session the caucus focused on legislation that promotes dignity and self-worth for women in a variety of circumstances. It worked to improve the lives of women and their families by requiring people who violate privacy in the first degree or promote prostitution to register as a sex offender. Advocating for the importance of dignity for all people, these bills impose lasting consequences on those who seek to exploit others and direct the courts to treat such actions with the appropriate weight and seriousness.

The Women's Caucus also successfully introduced a measure that prohibits employers from discriminating against victims of domestic or sexual violence. This bill recognizes that reasonable

accommodations should be made for victims in the workplace who are contending with issues of domestic or sexual violence. These might include allowing an employee time off to attend a court hearing or follow up with a doctor's appointment, or access to a phone or fax machine to transmit documents related to the situation.

In addition to working hard for the women of Hawaii at the Legislature, the caucus put ideas into action through various service projects which included our Easter basket drive. Each year, we collect baskets and fill them with essential household items, such as laundry soap, utensils, pots and pans, dishes, toiletries and towels, which will benefit homeless clients at the Institute for Human Services. The caucus was able to provide more than 200 baskets to IHS last year.

The Women's Caucus has made great strides in promoting women's rights and seeking to preserve the quality of life for women and their families. We strive to be the voice for those unheard and encourage all members of the community to join in support of our measures when they are introduced next session.

Contact state Rep. Cynthia Thielen, R-District 50 (Kailua-Kaneohe Bay), at 586-6480.