

OFFICE OF THE LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR  
*Ke Ke'ena O Ka Hope Kia'aina*

TO: Chair Justin Woodson  
Vice Chair Lisa Marten  
Members of the House Committee on Education

FROM: Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor

RE: Testimony for H.B. 961 – Relating to Early Learning

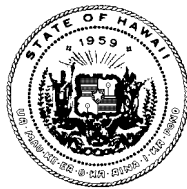
DATE: February 16, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of H.B. 961** which appropriates funds for the Preschool Open Doors Program and the Executive Office on Early Learning to expand access to preschool, expands accreditation opportunities, and authorizes the acceptance of federal funds.

Access to preschool is a social justice issue for our state and we know that children who attend high-quality preschool are much better prepared for success. Together with our public, private, and non-profit sector partners, we recently launched the Ready Keiki initiative, the administration's multi-faceted plan to expand high-quality childcare and preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds by 2032. We are focused on ensuring our keiki are ready when they start Kindergarten and creating economic stability for families who are returning to the workforce. Ready Keiki's success is contingent upon a multi-pronged approach which includes building and refurbishing classrooms, creating teaching pathways for educators, and expanding the Preschool Open Doors program for low- and moderate-income families. The amendments proposed in S.B. 961 are critical to ensuring that we maximize federal funding and opportunities to provide enough classrooms at an affordable price to economically disadvantaged keiki.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of H.B. 961.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 14, 2023

TO: The Honorable Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
House Committee on Education

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

**SUBJECT: HB 961 HD1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.**

**HEARING:** Thursday, February 16, 2023, 2:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 309 & Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill, provides comments, and defers to the Executive Office on Early Learning regarding the Public Pre-Kindergarten program. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation in this measure not replace or adversely impact priorities indicated in the executive budget.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the bill is to appropriate funds for the preschool open doors program and executive office on early learning to expand access to preschool and to implement program changes required by previous acts. Expands the types of entities from which a preschool open doors service provider may obtain accreditation. Expands the preschool open doors program application process to eligible three-year-old children. Authorizes the preschool open doors special fund to accept federal funds. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1). The HD1 amended this measure by:

- 1) Clarifying that the Preschool Open Doors Program application process shall be open to eligible three-year-old children;
- 2) Changing the effective date to June 30, 3000, to encourage further discussion;  
and

- 3) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

Regarding Part II, Section 3, given the continuing economic impacts of COVID-19 on child care facilities' ability to maintain sufficient staff levels, DHS suggests the Legislature consider amending section 346-184 (a), HRS, to change the accreditation requirement to be voluntary until the child care workforce is more stabilized or subsidized.

Additionally, as the Legislature contemplates expanding three-year-old children to be a permanent program, we ask that the appropriation be included in the executive budget measure.

To implement the expanded program, DHS will need time to draft and amend administrative rules and make needed system modifications.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill.

**HB-961-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/15/2023 10:16:26 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Yuuko Arikawa Cross	Executive Office on Early Learning	Support	In Person

Comments:



# UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

## ‘ŌNAEHANA KULANUI O HAWAII

### Legislative Testimony

### Hō'ike Mana'o I Mua O Ka 'Aha'ōlelo

Testimony Presented Before the  
House Committee on Education  
February 16, 2023 at 2:00 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert

Vice President for Academic Strategy  
University of Hawai'i System

#### HB 961 HD1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 961 HD1. The University of Hawai'i (UH) supports the Legislature's intent to expand access to affordable and quality early care and education opportunities to three-year-olds across the State.

Currently, only four-year-olds and children in the year prior to entering kindergarten are eligible to participate and enroll in the Executive Office on Early Learning's (EOEL's) public pre-kindergarten (PreK) program and Department of Human Services' (DHS) Preschool Open Doors (POD) child care subsidy program. This bill would expand the age-eligibility of EOEL's PreK program and DHS' POD child care subsidy program to include three-year-olds, thus increasing access to these programs and easing the financial burden many families face when accessing early learning opportunities.

UH is working collaboratively with stakeholders, including DHS, EOEL, the School Facilities Authority (SFA), and the Department of Education (DOE), to increase the availability of early care and education programs on a number of UH campuses. And while we are still developing how these facilities and programs can be sustained, we believe that State support of early childhood programs and facilities – wherever they may be located – are valuable to advancing educational development and learning for Hawai'i keiki.

We appreciate the Legislature's intention to provide financial assistance for more families to access affordable and quality early care and education and defer to DHS and EOEL regarding the implementation and provisions of the sections of the bill that are pertinent to the respective offices.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on this bill.

TO: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
Representative Lisa Marten, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Education

FROM: Robert G. Peters, Chair  
Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: Measure: H.B. No. 961 H.D. 1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Hearing Date: Thursday, February 16, 2023  
Time: 2:00 pm  
Location: Conference Room 329

EARLY LEARNING BOARD POSITION: Support

The Early Learning Board supports H.B. No. 961 H.D. 1 and defers to the Executive Office on Early Learning and the Department of Human Services (DHS) as it pertains to pertinent sections of the bill.

H.B. No. 961 H.D. 1 aligns with two of the Board’s policy priorities for this legislative session:

- Expand access and opportunity to quality early learning and care ...in both public and private sectors; and,
- Provide child care financial assistance for families/providers.

The ELB supports EOEL’s commitment to increasing access to affordable and high-quality early learning opportunities. The EOEL Public Pre-Kindergarten Program currently provides free public pre-kindergarten options on 37 classrooms across 34 Department of Education (HIDOE) campuses to 4-year-olds. ELB supports expanding the EOEL Public Pre-K program to 3-year-olds.

We also appreciate the Legislature’s intention to provide financial assistance to more families to support access to affordable high-quality early learning opportunities and defer to the Department of Human Services regarding the Preschool Open Doors program.

The ELB continues to support the efforts of EOEL working with its partners, such as the School Facilities Authority, DHS, the HIDOE, and other early learning stakeholders to bring the goals pursuant to Act 046, SLH 2020, to fruition. We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to support increasing access to affordable quality early learning programs and services in the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.B. 961 H.D. 1.



Committee on Education  
Representative Justin Woodson, Chair  
Representative, Lisa Marten, Vice Chair

February 16, 2023

Dear Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, and Members of the Committee,

We support HB 961 HD1, which appropriates moneys to the Department of Human Services for the Preschool Open Doors program and Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) to expand access to preschool and to implement program changes required by previous acts.

We support all approaches to increase access to quality early learning seats in our system. Hawai'i has a mixed delivery of early learning opportunities and we are thrilled that the legislature is expanding access to include three-year-olds to both the Preschool Open Doors program and EOEL classrooms.

Hui for Excellence in Education, or "HE'E," promotes a child-centered and strength-based public education system in which families, communities and schools are valued and empowered to help every student succeed. HE'E works to bring diverse stakeholders together to harness collective energy, share resources, and identify opportunities for progressive action in education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Our support represents at least a 75% consensus of our voting membership.

Sincerely,

Cheri Nakamura  
HE'E Coalition Director



Academy 21  
American Civil Liberties Union  
Alliance for Place Based Learning  
Castle Complex Community Council  
Coalition for Children with Special Needs  
Education Institute of Hawai'i  
\*Faith Action for Community Equity  
Fresh Leadership LLC  
Girl Scouts Hawaii  
Harold K.L. Castle Foundation  
\*HawaiiKidsCAN  
\*Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance  
\*Hawai'i Appleseed Center for Law and Economic Justice  
\*Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists  
Hawai'i Athletic League of Scholars  
\*Hawai'i Children's Action Network  
Hawai'i Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition  
Hawai'i Scholars for Education and Social Justice  
\* Hawai'i State PTSA  
Hawai'i State Student Council  
Hawai'i State Teachers Association  
Hawai'i P-20  
Hawai'i 3Rs  
Head Start Collaboration Office  
It's All About Kids  
\*INPEACE  
Joint Venture Education Forum  
Junior Achievement of Hawaii  
Kamehameha Schools  
Kanu Hawai'i  
Kaua'i Ho'okele Council  
Keiki to Career Kaua'i  
Kupu A'e  
\*Leaders for the Next Generation  
Learning First  
McREL's Pacific Center for Changing the Odds  
Native Hawaiian Education Council  
Our Public School  
\*Pacific Resources for Education and Learning  
\*Parents and Children Together  
\*Parents for Public Schools Hawai'i  
Special Education Provider Alliance  
\*Teach for America  
The Learning Coalition  
US PACOM  
University of Hawai'i College of Education  
\*Youth Service Hawai'i

*Voting Members (\*) Voting member organizations vote on action items while individual and non-voting participants may collaborate on all efforts within the coalition.*



To: Representative Woodson, Chair  
Representative Marten, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Education

Re: HB961 HD1, relating to early learning  
2:00 p.m., Feb. 16, 2023

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten and committee members:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify. **HCAN Speaks! supports the intent of House Bill 961 and offers comments.**

According to the Hawai'i KIDS COUNT, there were approximately 82,785 children under the age of 5 in 2021. There are, however, spaces for only 24,922 keiki in regulated child care settings and general education public pre-kindergarten classrooms. The shortage gets more acute the younger the child is.

This shortage of early childhood care and education programs from birth to kindergarten-entry can be tied directly to the unworkable economics of child care. **Early childhood care and education providers operate on razor-thin margins where the workforce is significantly underpaid. Meanwhile, families pay an average of \$14,000 annually to send their 3- and 4-year-old keiki to a licensed child care center.** Families and providers cannot shoulder anymore burden; they need support.

The U.S. Department of Treasury described in 2021 that “sound economic principles explain why relying on private money to provide child care is bound to come up short.” **Public investment is necessary.**

Quality early learning opportunities have lifelong positive impacts for children and their families. The work early childhood care and education professionals do sets keiki up for critical social and emotional skills, motor development, math, literacy and critical thinking. Additionally, parents and caregivers are able to work outside the home when they have safe and nurturing environments for their keiki.

**All Hawai'i families deserve access to these experiences. They also deserve for this access to be truly meaningful.**

As mentioned above, one of the largest barriers for families is cost. This is why **any effort to build a truly universal system needs to ensure free or very low-cost early childhood care and education programs available to all families.** Preschool Open Doors is one way that the Legislature can provide investments in community-based programs while ensuring families' costs remain low, ensuring meaningful access.

**We strongly support the expansion of the Preschool Open Doors to include 3-year-olds.** We also support the amendments to Preschool Open Doors prioritization that are included in this bill.

**We also respectfully recommend that committee members consider including the following additional provisions:**

- Add the following requirement to section 346-181, Hawaii Revised Statutes: The department shall adjust reimbursement rates for providers a minimum of once every two years based on either a true cost of care or cost estimation model;
- Add the following requirement to section 346-181, Hawaii Revised Statutes: The department shall provide reimbursement irrespective of a provider's tuition rate for a child;
- Add a reporting requirement section to the bill: The department shall report the budget impacts as well as impacts to overall family and provider economic self-sufficiency that increasing eligibility levels to include middle income families would have. The department may contract a third party to conduct this study in accordance with chapter 103D of the Hawaii Revised Statute;
- Amend the current section 346-184, Hawaii Revised Statutes as follows: (a) Each service provider of the preschool open doors program ~~shall~~ **may** be accredited. **The department shall establish tiered reimbursement rates for those providers who are accredited.** ~~or shall obtain accreditation within seven calendar years of first receiving any funds from the preschool open doors program; provided that any existing service provider unaccredited on July 1, 2022, shall commence the accreditation process no later than July 1, 2024, and obtain accreditation by July 1, 2029; provided further that the director may grant to any service provider one or more extensions to obtain accreditation on a case-by-case basis.~~ (b) **Higher reimbursement shall be provided for accreditation** ~~Accreditation under this section shall be obtained from one or more of the following national early learning accrediting organizations:~~“; and
- Increased appropriations for the administration of Preschool Open Doors so that staff can administer a program that is welcoming to families and that families do not face a chilling effect from difficult-to-navigate processes.

Additionally, we believe that **to achieve true meaningful access** for the families not served in public school settings, the legislature would need to appropriate **approximately \$240 million annually** to Preschool Open Doors. This would support nearly 20,000 3- and 4-year-olds.

This level of funding would provide meaningful financial assistance for most local families with young children ages 3 and 4. It will also ensure early childhood care and education providers are adequately reimbursed so that we can both maintain the current stock of classrooms and incentivize expansion.

**We would also like to provide comments on the amendments to HRS 302L-7.** HCAN Speaks! appreciates the interest in providing additional opportunities for both 3- and 4-year-olds in public school settings.

Any efforts to expand the EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program to include 3-year-olds must include the dedicated resources and personnel to ensure the program is developmentally appropriate. This includes ensuring enough funding and staffing to:

- Develop curricula specifically for 3-year-olds;
- Support educators' transition to teaching a younger age;
- Design and outfit indoor and outdoor spaces so they are developmentally appropriate for 3-year-olds; and
- Pilot additional supports for families including transportation services and prekindergarten-specific afterschool care.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide extensive comments on HB961 HD1. We are encouraged by the support universal preschool for 3- and 4-year-olds has garnered. **We urge committee members to support this measure with amendments to ensure expansion of early learning opportunities provides truly meaningful access while investing in the educators and programs that serve our youngest keiki.**

Mahalo,

Ke'ōpū Reelitz  
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy



TO: The Honorable Justin Woodson, Chair  
The Honorable Lisa Marten, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Education

FROM: Philip Bossert, Executive Director  
Hawaii Association of Independent Schools

RE: **HB 961 HD1 - Relating to Early Learning  
In Strong Support**

DATE: Thursday, February 16, 2023  
2:00 p.m.; Conference Room 309 & Videoconference

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS) and its subsidiary, the Hawaii Council of Private Schools (HCPS), strongly supports HB 961 HD1. Funding for the Open Doors program is an important resource for Hawaii families in providing early childhood education opportunities for their children.

HAIS also strongly supports the expansion of types of organizations from which Open Doors service providers may obtain accreditation. In particular, we believe that accreditation by HAIS should be recognized by DHS as an authorized accrediting organization for the Open Doors program. HAIS currently serves 114 independent PK-12 schools and over 33,000 students in Hawai'i. More than 50 of these schools include preschool programs.

In 1996, the legislature transferred responsibility for the licensing of private schools to HAIS and its subsidiary, HCPS. This licensing process ensures on an annual basis that every PK-12 private school is in compliance with the health and safety requirements of all federal and state agencies. In addition, for those schools which seek a higher level of educational program verification and recognition, the HAIS accreditation process provides a much more rigorous protocol of compliance and review, one that is recognized and accepted by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). The HAIS accreditation protocol includes a comprehensive self-study process and a three to five day visit to the school by a team of educators from other private schools in Hawaii and California with comparable programs to verify the information provided in the self-study document. We believe that this protocol and process is in line with those of the accrediting agencies already on the approved list.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. We would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

**HB-961-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 2:36:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Michael Golojuch Jr	Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Representatives,

The Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai‘i; Hawai‘i’s oldest and largest policy and political LGBTQIA+ focused organization fully supports HB 961 HD 1.

The Caucus wants to be assured that any schools that avail themselves of these funds must be treated as a public accommodation.

We hope you all will support this important piece of legislation.

Mahalo nui loa,

Michael Golojuch, Jr.  
Chair and SCC Representative  
Stonewall Caucus for the DPH



# Kamehameha Schools®

House Committee on Education

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Date: February 16, 2023

Where: Conference Room 309

## TESTIMONY

By Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Sarsona  
Kamehameha Schools

RE: **HB 961, HD1, Relating to Early Learning**

E ka Luna Ho‘omalū Woodson, ka Hope Luna Ho‘omalū Marten, a me nā lālā o ke Kōmike Ho‘ona‘auao o ka Hale o nā Lunamaka‘āinana, aloha kākou! My name is Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Sarsona, Vice President of Hi‘ialo at Kamehameha Schools.

Kamehameha Schools **supports** HB 961, HD1, which appropriates moneys for the Preschool Open Doors Program and the Executive Office on Early Learning to expand access to preschool and to implement program changes required by previous acts. This measure also expands the types of entities from which a Preschool Open Doors service provider may obtain accreditation, expands the Preschool Open Doors Program application process to eligible three-year-old children, authorizes the preschool open doors special fund to accept federal funds, and appropriates moneys.

The enactment of Act 46 (2020) launched Hawai‘i on a path forward to ensure that every three- and four-year-old has access to early learning by year 2032. We are still recovering from the negative impacts of the pandemic of this sector, which resulted in the statewide decrease in capacity to provide childcare by 12%, including 2,850 fewer preschool seats. Our keiki cannot afford to lose any more.

The cost of full-time childcare remains a top three expense for so many ‘ohana across Hawai‘i. The average annual cost of childcare in Hawai‘i for a 4-year-old is \$8,937, or \$745 each month. Expanding access to the Preschool Open Doors program (POD), increasing funding to POD, and making necessary changes to the law will ensure that more three- and four-year-old keiki in need will have access to quality early learning. **Please advance this measure.**

Founded in 1887, Kamehameha Schools is an educational organization striving to restore our people through education and advance a thriving Lāhui where all Native Hawaiians are successful, grounded in traditional values, and leading in the local and global communities. We believe that community success is individual success, Hawaiian culture-based education leads to academic success and local leadership drives global leadership. Hānai i ke keiki; ola ka lāhui.

‘A‘ohe ‘ulu e loa‘a i ka pōkole o ka lou. There is no success without preparation.



Date: February 15, 2023

To: House Committee on Education  
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
Rep. Lisa Marten, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Support for **HB961 HD1**, Relating to Early Learning

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Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

**ECAS strongly supports passage of HB961 HD1**, which would appropriate funding for the Preschool Open Doors Program (POD) and Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) to expand access to preschool and to implement program changes to facilitate this expansion.

There are over 35,000 preschool-age children 3-4 years old in Hawaii. Unfortunately, limited availability and capacity of programs, high costs and unaffordable rates, and insufficient financial supports significantly restrict families' access to preschool opportunities for their keiki. Presently, POD provides key financial assistance to enable about 1,400 4-year-olds to attend preschool. Expanded POD funding and adjusted age-eligibility for the program to include 3-year-olds is critical to enabling additional children to attend preschool and benefit from the quality early learning experiences that will prepare them for kindergarten and later success in school and life.

Expansion of POD, in particular, supports a strong element of family choice into public preschool expansion efforts. POD provides families with access to a diversity of community-based preschool programs that meet a wide range of potential child and family needs and preferences, such as the need for full-day, full-year services that support working families. We hope you will support a combined approach to building out publicly-funded access to preschool through a *healthy expansion of the POD program*.

Additionally, we agree with the Department of Human Services' concerns regarding the tenuous state of child care programs and support recommendations to either change Preschool Open Doors quality accreditation requirements to be voluntary, until workforce conditions are more stable, or extend the timeframes by which programs must become accredited.

With regards to the potential expansion of eligibility for EOEL's public prekindergarten program to 3-year-olds, we would like to stress the importance of developmentally-appropriate standards and differentiated services for this younger age group and the need for thoughtful planning, preparation and implementation of any expansion of the current public prekindergarten program to 3-year-olds.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony **in support of HB961 HD1**.



February 16, 2023

TO: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair  
Lisa Marten, Vice Chair  
and Members of the House Committee on Education

FROM: Kerrie Urosevich, Co-Chair  
Commit to Keiki

RE: H.B. 961 HD1  
Relating to Early Learning

Commit to Keiki strongly supports House Bill (HB) 961 HD1, Relating to Early Learning. HB 961 HD1 provides additional funding to the Department of Human Services' Preschool Open Doors (POD) program to expand POD to serve 3 year olds.

Presently, POD provides critical financial assistance to enable about 1,400 4 year olds to attend preschool. Expanding POD to 3 year olds will enable additional children to attend preschool so that they will be better prepared for kindergarten and lifelong learning.

Thank you for allowing Commit to Keiki to provide testimony on this important measure.

Commit to Keiki, a project of the Early Childhood Action Strategy, is a public-private collaborative to ensure that Hawai'i's youngest children (birth to 5 years old) and their families have a brighter start. Early Childhood Action Strategy is a project under Collaborative Support Services, Inc. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, with representatives from Hawai'i business, education, early intervention, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, Commit to Keiki serves as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



Feb. 15, 2023

To: Representative Justin Woodson, Chair  
Representative Lisa Marten, Vice Chair  
House Committee on Education

Subject: **Measure** - HB961 HD1 RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING  
**Hearing Date** - Feb. 16, 2023  
**Time** - 2:00 PM  
**Location** - Conference Room 309

**I support HB961 HD1 and offer comments.**

My name is Dr. Terry Lock. I am with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) College of Education (COE) and serve as the director of the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE<sup>3</sup>) Project.

I support universal access to high quality, accessible and affordable preschool for Hawai'i's three-year old and four-year old keiki!

I am in favor of an appropriately-funded mixed-delivery system to programs for children, birth through age five, including preschool programs. A mixed-delivery system means that there are seats for keiki in both public school and community-based settings. This approach draws upon the decades of expertise and infrastructure in the early care and education sector that includes DHS licensed centers, Head Start, public school prekindergarten, and community-based agencies. This approach provides families with more options that meet their needs, preferences and choices.

Therefore, I am in strong support of the expansion of Department of Human Services (DHS) Preschool Open Doors program (community-based) and Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) prekindergarten programs (public schools).

HB961 HD1 appropriates additional funding to DHS for the expansion of the POD program, which will provide families with subsidies and increase more preschool seats for three-year olds and four-year olds in community-based programs. It also provides funding and other resources to hire additional staffing and improve technology for the implementation of the POD program. This bill identifies the types of accreditation bodies which POD service providers may choose to utilize. This bill authorizes the POD special fund to accept federal funds.

Furthermore, I offer the following as additional provisions in the bill:

- DHS set reimbursement rates based on the true cost of care rather than only on the current market rate and that reimbursement be a flat rate and irrespective of the tuition charged to non-subsidy families.
- DHS expand the eligibility requirements for more middle-income families
- Increase funding to DHS for the administration of POD so there are trained family-friendly staff who can help families navigate the application process.
- Make the accreditation process voluntary and incentive those programs who obtain accreditation with higher subsidy rates.

HB961 HD1 appropriates funding to EOEL to work collaboratively across stakeholders, including DHS, Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDO)E, and the Hawai'i State Public Charter School Commission (HSPCS), to expand options and availability of pre-kindergarten programs for all three-and four-year olds across the State. Currently, the EOEL Public Pre-K program only serves children in the year prior to entering kindergarten. This bill will give EOEL the authority to serve three-year olds.

Therefore, I offer the following as an additional provision in the bill:

- Funding be given to EOEL to ensure there is environmental infrastructure, staffing, provisions for toilet learning, and other resources to support developmentally appropriate practices for three-year olds.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**HB-961-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/15/2023 1:58:32 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tricia L Tolentino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

TO: Representative Woodson, Chair

Representative Marten, Vice Chair

House Committee on Education

RE: HB 961 Relating to Early Learning

2:00pm, Feb. 16, 2023

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten and Education Committee Members Kapela, Martinez, Matayoshi, Perruso, Quinlan, Todd, and Garcia.

I strongly support HB961.

My name is Trish Tolentino and I am a mother of three boys aged 8 to 3 years old. I previously worked with the UH system as an educator and am currently an MSW candidate at the UHM Thompson School of Social Work.

According to the Hawai'i profile of the 2022 KIDS COUNT Data Book:

- 53% of young children (or ages 3 or 4 yrs old) are not in school.
- 37% of children live in households with a high housing cost burden
- 27% of children whose parents lack secure employment

These numbers demonstrate the fact that many Hawai'i parents and families face economic hardship which may prevent families from sending their children to preschool. The cost of preschool is prohibitive for many working families, who already struggle with high housing, food, and fuel costs. Preschool Open Doors' program is one way to level the playing field for equity in early childhood education. Expanding the Preschool Open Doors program to eligible three-year old children is crucial. Kids who come from economically disadvantaged backgrounds have the most to gain from preschool. Extending the Preschool Open Doors' program one more year, and therefore making a kid eligible for two years instead of just one year prior to kindergarten, will give a child an even stronger foundation for their learning and success.

As a first generation college student, I did not have the opportunity to attend preschool because of the cost to my parents. My older two sons attended preschool (one attended Head Start) and I currently have a 3-yr old in preschool. It was a struggle to find affordable yet quality preschool programs for my kids and while we manage to pay for my 3-yr old, it certainly doesn't come without sacrifices.

Kids from low-income and working families will benefit greatly from the expansion of the Preschool Open Doors Program to include three-year olds.

Please support this measure.

Very respectfully yours,

Tricia L Tolentino

**LATE**

**HB-961-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/16/2023 1:26:31 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/16/2023 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Elento	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Marten, and Members of the House Committee on Education,

Hawai‘i Revised Statutes include the Association of Christian Schools International ACSI in its definition for private schools K-12. I request the Committee consider adding ACSI for early learning to this bill Page 2, Line 10, and noting in its Committee Report, reasons and considerations below.

Revise Section 346-184, Hawai‘i Revised Statutes, by adding the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) as an accrediting organization or by exempting providers with ACSI accreditation from (b).

Preschool Open Doors and Child Care Connection subsidies should recognize ACSI as an early education accreditation allowing the program to receive higher reimbursement rates for subsidized children, whereas currently a school with ages 3 through elementary school accredited by WASC Western Association of Schools and Colleges and ACSI only qualifies for about 75% of the higher reimbursement rates because the school is not also accredited by NAEYC (similar) (example of a specific accreditation in the HRS).

Currently providers with ACSI accreditation participate with Open Doors preschool program without the accreditation listed in the HRS. Getting and maintaining accreditations are costly, time-consuming, and on-going; a national early learning accreditation can directly conflict with religious freedom. Families need fair access to faith-based providers. I request the Committee consider adding to its committee report the US Supreme Court’s decision issued on June 21, 2022, in Carson v. Makin: [https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-1088\\_dbfi.pdf](https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/20-1088_dbfi.pdf). Requiring a service provider to seek accreditation from a national early learning accrediting organization would disqualify some private schools solely because they are religious.

Also, children with developmental disabilities require equal access to programs and not be limited by age criteria to avoid disability discrimination.

HRS 346-181-(b)(2) “Underserved or at-risk children” is subjective. For example, a child who is eligible for preschool special education (whether parent elects to receive or not to receive preschool special education services) may be considered served, not underserved. Age criteria must be flexible for this population.

Children who turn five years old in August face three full years of preschool at age 3, 4, and 5, such as my 3-year-old grandson will be destined to, or seek homeschooling or private school as the alternative options because they have graduated from preschool. Our laws must allow for flexibility for when a child may enter kindergarten, and choose IDEA early intervention and special education programs.

In addition to ACSI accreditation, to improve upon the current POD, extension of the application period should be considered, as Child Care Connection is year round, as incomes vary, and more likely between a March deadline and August school start. Also, without an activity-level requirement, POD favors home-schooled siblings whereas Child Care Connection does not.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Linda Elento, Hawai'i citizen