

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

TO: Chair Kyle Yamashita
Vice Chair Lisa Kitagawa
Members of the House Committee on Finance

FROM: Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor

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

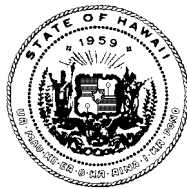
DATE: February 24, 2023

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 H.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 22, 2023

TO: The Honorable Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: [HB 961 HD1](#) – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING.

HEARING: Friday, February 24, 2023, 1:30 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & 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 to implement an expanded Preschool Open Doors program be included 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.

Regarding Part III, Section 5, which will expand the Preschool Open Doors program to serve eligible three-year-old children, DHS estimates **additional** general fund appropriations of \$39,836,000 for SFY 2024-2025 and \$39,336,00 for SFY2025-2026. These amounts break down as follows:

	Four-year-olds – current budget	Three-year-olds – new	Increased subsidy rate	New appropriation
Annual Subsidies	\$11,600,000	11,600,000	\$27,200,000	\$38,800,000
Annual Expand POD Contracts	536,000	536,000		536,000
One-time IT modification		500,000		500,000
			Total for FY2024-2025	\$39,836,000
			Total for FY2025-2026	\$39,336,000

DHS submitted a budget request to the Green administration for its consideration. The Green administration authorized similar amounts, less \$536,000 the amount requested to expand POD contract services. 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.



STATE OF HAWAII
Executive Office on Early Learning
2759 South King Street
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

February 22, 2023

TO: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Measure: H.B. No. 961 H.D. 1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING
Hearing Date: Friday, February 24, 2023
Time: 1:30 pm
Location: Conference Room 308

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

EOEL supports H.B. No. 961 H.D. 1 and defers to the Department of Human Services (DHS) as it pertains to pertinent sections of the bill.

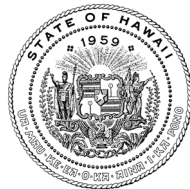
EOEL is committed to increasing access to affordable and high-quality early learning opportunities. The EOEL Public Pre-Kindergarten Program currently provides free public pre-kindergarten options in 37 classrooms across 34 Department of Education (HIDOE) campuses to 4-year-olds. EOEL supports expanding 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 DHS regarding the implementation and budgetary needs of the Preschool Open Doors program.

EOEL is committed to working with our 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 on this bill.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR



LUIS P. SALAVERIA
DIRECTOR

SABRINA NASIR
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

EMPLOYEES' RETIREMENT SYSTEM
HAWAII EMPLOYER-UNION HEALTH BENEFITS TRUST FUND
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
Ka 'Oihana Mālama Mo'ohelu a Kālā
P.O. BOX 150
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96810-0150

ADMINISTRATIVE AND RESEARCH OFFICE
BUDGET, PROGRAM PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT DIVISION
FINANCIAL ADMINISTRATION DIVISION
OFFICE OF FEDERAL AWARDS MANAGEMENT

WRITTEN ONLY
TESTIMONY BY LUIS P. SALAVERIA
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF BUDGET AND FINANCE
TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
ON
HOUSE BILL NO. 961, H.D. 1

February 24, 2023
1:30 p.m.
Room 308 and Videoconference

RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

The Department of Budget and Finance (B&F) offers comments on this bill.

House Bill No. 961, H.D. 1: 1) amends Section 346-184, HRS, to remove the requirement that Preschool Open Doors (POD) providers accredited through a national early learning accrediting organization not specifically listed in the section be comparable to the organizations listed; 2) amends Section 302L-7, HRS, to expand the Executive Office on Early Learning's pre-kindergarten program to include three-year-old children and to modify the application process' prioritization criteria to reflect the program expansion; 3) amends Section 346-181, HRS, to restore language relating to the service of three-year-olds and POD priority categories; 4) amends Section 346-182, HRS, to allow federal funds to be deposited into the POD Special Fund (PODSF); and 5) amends Act 210, SLH 2021, to remove the sunset date on amendments made to Section 346-181, HRS. The measure also appropriates an undetermined amount of general funds in FY 24 and FY 25 to be deposited into the PODSF and appropriates an undetermined amount of special funds out of the PODSF in FY 24 and FY 25 for the

Department of Human Services to cover POD staff, staff benefits, and system modifications.

B&F does not support the inclusion of language to allow the deposit of federal funds into the PODSF. Federal funds should be kept separate from other types of funds for compliance and reporting purposes. Further, the purpose of a federal grant may not be totally aligned with the statutory uses of the PODSF.

Additionally, B&F notes that the FB 2023-25 Executive Biennium Budget, as amended by the Green Administration, includes providing \$500,000 in general funds in FY 24 to implement POD system modifications and increasing POD funding by \$38,800,000 in general funds in FY 24 and FY 25 to expand program coverage to three-year-olds and increase monthly voucher payments.

Thank you for your consideration of our 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 Finance
Friday, February 24, 2023 at 1:30 p.m.

By

Debora Halbert
Vice President for Academic Strategy
University of Hawai'i System

HB 961 HD1 – RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, 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.

HB-961-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 5:41:34 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 1:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Douglass S. Adams	Department of Research and Development, County of Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee on Finance:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong SUPPORT of HB 961 HD1, which appropriates 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, and authorizes the preschool open doors special fund to accept federal funds. The County of Hawaii supports the intent of HB 961 HD1, which will enable early learning and child care opportunities for more children and families. This is an upstream fix that will pay major dividends for our keiki, our communities, and our state in the decades to come.

We strongly encourage the Committee to move HB 961 HD1 forward with a POSITIVE recommendation for House passage.

very respectfully

Douglass S Adams

Director, Dept of Research & Development

County of Hawaii

To: Representative Yamashita, Chair
Representative Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

Re: HB961 HD1, relating to early learning
1:30 p.m., Feb. 24, 2023

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa and committee members:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify. **HCAN Speaks! supports House Bill 961 HD1 and respectfully requests amendments.**

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 \$13,500 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 providers 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



Committee on Finance
Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative, Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

February 24, 2023

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, 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: The Honorable Kyle Yamashita, Chair
The Honorable Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

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

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

DATE: Friday, February 24, 2023; Agenda #3
1:30 p.m.; Conference Room 308 & Videoconference

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa 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.



Kamehameha Schools®

House Committee on Finance

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Date: February 24, 2023

Where: Conference Room 308

TESTIMONY

By Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Sarsona
Kamehameha Schools

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

E ka Luna Ho‘omalu Yamashita, ka Hope Luna Ho‘omalu Kitagawa, a me nā lālā o ke Kōmike Waiwai 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 on 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.



February 24, 2023

TO: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
and Members of the House Committee on Finance

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.

TO: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Representative Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Robert G. Peters, Chair
Early Learning Board

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

Hearing Date: Friday, February 24, 2023

Time: 1:30 pm

Location: Conference Room 308

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.



Date: February 23, 2023

To: House Committee on Finance
Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

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

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**.

HB-961-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 6:06:20 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 1:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Linda Elento	Individual	Comments	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the House Committee on Finance,

I believe a revision of the requirements in the statutes (for accreditation, timeline, priority enrollments, operational decisions) should be considered and further testimony received before funding this bill. Being a parent (and special education parent) and grandparent, I base my testimony on experience and caselaw.

Page 2, Lines 12-14, 19: Are the accrediting organizations ACSI (international), WASC (national), and HAIS (State of Hawaii) considered "national early learning accrediting organizations" or "approved by the director" of Human Services? The statute here is not clear and approval of the director is subjective and subject to change.

§302A-1132(d) includes the Association of Christian Schools International ACSI in its definition for private schools for K-12. The Committee should consider revising **§346-184**, by adding the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) as an accrediting organization or by exempting providers with ACSI accreditation from (b).

For providers having only ACSI accreditation, or both ACSI and WASC, DHS only pays 75 percent of the highest subsidy rate. I believe this administrative policy should be changed immediately to 100% as offered for providers having NAEYC accreditation.

The "national early learning accreditation" specified in this statute directly conflicts with religious freedom. Families need fair access to faith-based providers holding ACSI accreditation instead of NAEYC, for example, because NAEYC may conflict with the provider's religious freedom and beliefs.

Requiring a service provider to seek accreditation from a national early learning accrediting organization would disqualify some private schools solely because they are religious. Refer to 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.

Page 3, Lines 10-13: Children with developmental disabilities require equal access to programs and not be limited by age criteria or IEP placement/due process to avoid disability discrimination.

§346-181-(b)(2) “Underserved or at-risk children” is subjective even with a definition in **§302L-1** "At-risk children" ... **(1)** Who are placed through their individualized education programs in a general education setting;

Regarding a child who is eligible for preschool special education (whether parent elects to receive or not to receive preschool special education services under IDEA) the statute could be misinterpreted to mean served, not underserved, just because an IEP/FAPE (or potentially an IFSP) was offered by the state. Families reserve the right to choose special education and early intervention services and the right to non-discrimination to access the POD and child care subsidies.

Page 4, Line 12: §302A-411, age criteria should allow for flexibility for when a child may enter kindergarten, and choose IDEA early intervention and special education programs. For example, a child who turns 3 in August can enter preschool that fall term and face 3 full years of preschool (when only 2 years prior to Kindergarten would be typical) or they must find a private school, possibly a charter school, or homeschool when they are 5 years old.

Local and military families need our laws to provide for flexibility for when a child may enter kindergarten, and choose IDEA early intervention and special education programs, as well as consideration of other funding sources and strings attached such as federal block grants.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Linda Elento, Constituent