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January 29, 2023

TO: The Honorable Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 339 – EXEMPTIONS FROM CIVIL SERVICE FOR POSITIONS IN THE
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES.**

Hearing: January 31, 2023, 9:30 a.m.
Conference Room & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure and requests a technical amendment.

PURPOSE: The bill's purpose is to permanently exempt eight positions in the Department of Human Services from civil service.

DHS appreciates Chair Mizuno for introducing this measure. DHS has vast responsibility to Hawaii residents who need financial assistance, food assistance, health care coverage, child care subsidies, rental assistance, vocational rehabilitation services, homeless services, and protective services. DHS oversees nearly \$4B in funds, more than 80 offices statewide, and a staff of nearly 2,000 positions. Attached agencies include: the Hawaii Public Housing Authority, the Office of Youth Services (OYS), which includes the Hawaii Youth Correctional Facility and the Kawaihoa Youth & Family Wellness Center, the State Rehabilitation Council, and the new State Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions that includes the Hawaii Interagency Council on Homelessness. DHS also administratively supports the following Commissions established

within DHS: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Commission on Fatherhood, the Youth Commission (established within OYS), and the new Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus Commission.

The Director's office has one Director and one Deputy Director; the Director's office only has two permanent positions: the Administrative Assistant and the Public Information Officer. Especially in years of significant events that impact low income residents, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and economic recessions, DHS needs continuity of leadership with the knowledge and experience working with the complexity of the safety net programs.

While much of the government is transitioning to learning how to live with COVID-19 in a "steady state," in the next year, DHS will pivot again to meet the challenges to redetermine program eligibility as federal pandemic program waivers end. Known as the "unwinding" of the public health emergency (PHE), the "unwinding" will require significant strategic planning, communications, outreach to the community, and collaboration with partner agencies. In addition, with high vacancy rates, we know we will need to maximize our partnerships to minimize the disruptions to residents' access to benefits and services.

If these positions are not made permanent and exempt, the Director must rely on temporary measures to carry on projects, seek out and participate in grant opportunities, and attend to the numerous legislative and other initiatives.

The Special Assistant, Community Development Director, Policy Director positions, and the Limited English Proficiency Program Manager position are essential to support the Director in the operations of DHS. For example, these positions lead, facilitate, and collaborate on cross-sector and interdepartmental initiatives such as data sharing, data governance, public outreach and training, grant proposals and grant-funded projects, public-private opportunities, and congressional and State legislative inquiries, and provide comments to federal proposed legislation. In addition, all Director's Office staff receives and facilitates response to complaints.

The Director's office also participates in numerous legislative task forces, councils, advisory boards, workgroups, commissions, and initiatives to improve government services, processes, new programs, cross-sector collaborative efforts, grant proposals, grant management, emergency management response, and outreach efforts.

The Director's office staff also drafts and shepherds memoranda of understanding (MOU) to allow and improve interagency collaborations. These initiatives require knowledgeable staff with decision-making authority or understanding of the DHS decision-making processes.

The Director's office led the Department through a significant pivot to a telework environment that successfully addressed the exponential increase in residents' need for health care coverage, cash assistance, and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Benefits (SNAP). In addition, the pivot emphasized the health and safety of the human services workforce, our contracted providers, and our client base. For example, the Director's office assisted with executing Pandemic-EBT agreements to ensure children and their families received additional food assistance during school closures, drafted contract agreements to distribute more than \$71M in child care provider grants to stabilize child care, and ensured procurement of PPE for DHS offices statewide and distribution to providers.

DHS previously and currently relies upon contracted project-based IT professionals to lead many IT-related projects. However, this strategy is not efficient or sustainable to support the necessary and lengthy project design, procurement, and multi-step approval processes, development, and implementation of new systems while maintaining the existing systems.

The information technology implementation manager is a project manager and provides leadership, coordination, and support to DHS's IT modernization efforts. This position coordinates and collaborates with consultants, contractors, DHS technical and business leads, and project managers of critical projects that include Med-QUEST Division's KOLEA integrated eligibility and integrated health and human services technical platform, the Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division's Benefit Eligibility Solution (BES), and the Social Services Division's Comprehensive Child Welfare and Adult Services Modernization and Legacy Replacement Project.

The position requires extensive knowledge of procurement, fiscal resources, program management, cross-project management, and coordination involving multiple technologies and functions; project management methodologies and practices; knowledge of information systems principles, methodologies, and assumptions; and principles and practices of

supervision, budgeting, planning, and human and organizational behavior. Knowledge of the public sector or human services business domain is preferred.

The assistant information technology implementation manager serves as an assistant project manager who coordinates and supports the DHS IT modernization project. This position assists in developing the overall schedules and work plans, focusing on the integration and coordination of critical projects to maximize efficiencies, ensure synergies, minimize risks, and prevent barriers to any single project and the overall project.

The resource manager provides technical assistance and oversight of the DHS IT resources assigned to the various IT modernization and other IT-related initiatives. This position works with department divisions and staff office personnel, consultants, and contractors to implement solutions that allow the integration of multiple platforms, operating systems, and applications across DHS and the State. Notably, the resource manager coordinates federal and State funding for IT projects and identifies the best approach to maximize federal funding from various sources. This position requires a bachelor's or master's degree in computer science, information systems, accounting, finance, or other related fields.

The positions in the Director's office require a high level of professional experience and expertise that do not currently exist within the civil service. Notably, the Director's office initiatives in the past eight years to modernize DHS systems and processes have improved working conditions for the civil service workforce and were fundamental to pivoting to the pandemic's demands. In addition, program innovation and professional development initiatives have provided a pathway for civil service and exempt staff to gain new skills and apply for leadership positions. The modernization efforts, including the child welfare services IT system, are ongoing and will create a modern IT environment that will make the civil service work more manageable and less frustrating. Significantly, a concern of federal funders for the child welfare services IT development is whether the State has the requisite staff to oversee the project.

Given the number of new programmatic and novel proposals and additional task forces and workgroups that the Legislature is considering this session, DHS needs these additional positions to become permanent leadership positions.

Lastly, Act 278, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022, amended section 76-16(b), and we request technical amendments to reflect the latest version of section 76-16(b).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide additional comments.