

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

TO: Chair John Mizuno
Vice Chair Terez Amato
Members of the House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Sylvia Luke, Lieutenant Governor

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

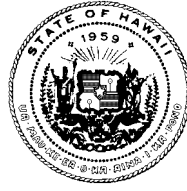
DATE: February 2, 2023

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of S.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 S.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

January 31, 2023

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

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

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

HEARING: February 2, 2023, 9:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill and provides comments. 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 appropriates moneys 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. Authorizes the preschool open doors special fund to accept federal funds. Appropriates moneys.

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, and we await its decision.

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. However, DHS respectfully requests that the added appropriation not replace other budget priorities.

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.

Feb. 1, 2023

To: Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services

Subject: **Measure** - HB 961 RELATING TO EARLY LEARNING
Hearing Date - Feb. 2, 2023
Time - 9:00 AM
Location - Conference Room 329

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 (ECE³) Project.

I support HB 961 with comments.

In order to address the need for universal access for all three and four-year olds to benefit from accessible, affordable, high-quality early learning experiences, HB 961 appropriates additional funding to the Department of Human Services (DHS) Preschool Open Doors (POD) program. Funding and other resources will also be used to hire additional staffing and improve technology for the implementation of the POD program. HB 961 also expands the types of entities from which a POD service provider may obtain accreditation and authorizes the POD special fund to accept federal funds.

HB 961 appropriates funding to the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) to work collaboratively across stakeholders, including DHS, Hawai'i Department of Education (HIDO), 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.

Please consider providing EOEL with additional funding to ensure there is adequate environmental infrastructure, staffing, and other needed resources to support the development and learning of three-year olds.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify in support of HB 961 with comments.



Kamehameha Schools®

House Committee on Human Services

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Date: February 2, 2023

Where: Conference Room 329

TESTIMONY

By Dr. Wai‘ale‘ale Sarsona
Kamehameha Schools

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

E ka Luna Ho‘omalua Mizuno, ka Hope Luna Ho‘omalua Amato, a me nā lālā o kēia Kōmike 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, which appropriates moneys 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. This measure also expands the types of entities from which a Preschool Open Doors service provider may obtain accreditation, 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.



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

February 1, 2023

TO: Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services

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

SUBJECT: Measure: H.B. No. 961 – RELATING EARLY LEARNING
Hearing Date: Thursday, February 2, 2023
Time: 9:00 am
Location: Conference Room 329

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

EOEL supports H.B. No. 961 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 while building the infrastructure needed to make sure the State's investment reaps the intended returns. The EOEL Public Pre-Kindergarten Program provides free public pre-kindergarten options currently on 37 classrooms across 34 Department of Education (HIDOE) campuses, while child care subsidies and tuition assistance programs such as Preschool Open Doors, help eligible families to afford child care and preschool tuition rates, alleviating the financial burden many families face when attempting to access early learning opportunities.

Section 5 of this bill would amend section 346-181 to open the Preschool Open Doors program to serve three and four-year olds and appropriates funds. We 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 implementation and the provisions of this section of the bill.

Pursuant to Act 046, SLH 2020, EOEL is working collaboratively across stakeholders, including DHS, HIDOE, and the Hawaii 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. Section 4 of this bill would amend section 302 L-7 to also serve three-year olds.

EOEL anticipates a need for funding and resources to ensure existing classrooms have the adequate environmental infrastructure to enroll three-year olds. It would be ideal for classrooms to have easy access to bathrooms and diaper changing areas. EOEL is currently working with the School Facilities Authority, the Hawaii Department of Education, and other community stakeholders to address infrastructure needs.

As such, we respectfully ask the committee to consider amending the H.B. No. 961 to include appropriation language to cover the costs of expanding existing and new classrooms to three-year olds for fiscal year 2023-2024 and fiscal year 2024-2025. The appropriation can be made to either EDN700 or to the Early Learning Special Fund at the discretion of the committee.

We also respectfully request section (b) subsections (1) and (2) of Chapter 302 L-7 be amended to reflect the addition of three-year olds as follows:

“(b) The office shall implement an application process for schools that are interested in participating in the program. The criteria to prioritize applications shall include:

- (1) Community need, including:
 - (A) The percentage of the population in the school or community that meets the definitions of at-risk and underserved children pursuant to section 302L-1; and
 - (B) The availability and capacity of existing early learning programs or services for three and four-year-old children on the school campus and in the surrounding area;
- (2) The availability of a classroom and outdoor play area that meet department of human services requirements for health and safety for three and four-year-old children”

EOEL is committed to working with our partners, such as the School Facilities Authority, HIDEOE, 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.



Steering Committee



'Aha Punana Leo

A'ali'i Alliance

*Association for Infant
Mental Health Hawai'i*

*Chamber of Commerce
Hawai'i*

Consuelo Foundation

*Domestic Violence Action
Center*

Early Learning Board

Family Hui Hawai'i

Harold KL Castle Foundation

*Hawaii Executive
Collaborative*

*Hawaii Community
Foundation*

Imua Family Services

Kamehameha Schools

*Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance*

Ke Ala Ho'aka

*Parents and Children
Together*

Partners in Development

PATCH

Nest for Families

*Samuel N. and Mary Castle
Foundation*

Seagull Schools

*State Fatherhood
Commission*

Stupski Foundation

The Omidyar 'Ohana Fund

W.K. Kellogg Foundation

January 30, 2023

TO: Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair;
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair;
and members of the House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Kerrie Urosevich and Alex Harris, Co-Chairs
Commit to Keiki

RE: **Committee on Human Services Hearing:
February 2, 2023, 9AM
House Bill 961, Relating to Early Learning**

Commit to Keiki strongly supports House Bill (HB) 961, Relating to Early Learning. HB 961 appropriates an unspecified amount of general funds for 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 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 Mizuno, Chair
Representative Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services

Re: HB961, relating to early learning
9:00 a.m., Feb. 2, 2023

Aloha Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Amato 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 as well as public pre-kindergarten classrooms.¹ The shortage of programs that provide full-time care and education for young children gets more acute the younger the child is.

To compound this problem, families face steep costs for early childhood care and education programs. Families sending their 3- and 4-year-old keiki to a licensed child care center face an average of \$14,000 a year in tuition costs.² Again, this cost increases dramatically the younger a child is.

Early childhood care and education programs face their own sets of challenges. They often operate on razor-thin margins. Their staff—though dedicated and specialized in their training and experience—are among the most undervalued professionals in the state. A 2022 study completed by the University of Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity Project showed that early childhood care and education professionals earned between \$13 and \$17 per hour on average. This is far below what it takes to earn a living wage in Hawai'i.

The U.S. Department of Treasury described in 2021 how “several market failures” explain why the nation's current child care system is unworkable.³ Beyond the reasons behind the failures,

¹ This total includes data from [People Attention to Children](#) (PATCH) as well as the number of classrooms listed as available for [EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program](#) and in [Charter Schools](#).

² PATCH, [Hawaii State Point-In-Time Child Care Data](#)

³ U.S. Department of Treasury, [The Economics of Child Care Supply in the United States](#), pg 2



the Treasury stated that “sound economic principles explain why relying on private money to provide child care is bound to come up short.”⁴ **Public investment is necessary.**

The case for providing public investment in early childhood care and education is sound. Not only does the private child care market need government subsidization, as the U.S. Department of Treasury notes. We also know that public investment will pay dividends for our next generation.

Quality early learning opportunities have lifelong positive impacts for children. Our brains never develop more rapidly than they do in the first five years of life. Young brains develop best when they're nurtured by positive adult/caregiver relationships as well as developmentally appropriate environments and experiences that build foundational skills. 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.

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

In Hawai'i and all across the U.S., communities rely on what early childhood policy professionals refer to as a mixed delivery system. A mixed delivery system is one in which **public funds go to programs in public school settings as well as in community-based programs** that may be run by local non-government organizations. HCAN Speaks! supports an approach like this because it would ensure that families have access to community-based programs as well as public school programs where their unique needs can be best served.

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.** A truly mixed delivery system would allow public investment into community-based programs. 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.

⁴ U.S. Department of Treasury, [The Economics of Child Care Supply in the United States](#), pg 2



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

- Requirements that the Department of Human Services (DHS) set reimbursement rates based on the true cost of care rather than solely by the current market rate and that reimbursement be a flat rate and irrespective of the tuition charged to non-subsidy families;
- Requirements that DHS consider increasing eligibility levels to include middle income families⁵;
- 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; and
- An amendment to HRS 346-184 that would make accreditation voluntary but incentivized by higher reimbursement rates.

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. We want to be sure though that **any expansion of the EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program for 3-year-olds is developmentally appropriate.** This includes curriculum, training and supports for staff as well as facilities.

Three-year-olds require curricula attentive to their specific developmental needs. Even mixed age programs rely on best practices where interactions between 3- and 4-year-olds are carefully structured to build necessary skills of each age group. Early childhood care and

⁵ Drafts of the Build Back Better Plan noted that some level of subsidy be provided to families who earned up to 250% of the state median income. (First Five Years Fund, [FAQ on the Child Care and Preschool Provisions in the Build Back Better Act](#)) This would mean a family of three earning up to approximately \$250,000 per year would have received some tiered level of assistance. This would provide assistance to a nearly universal population of families.



education programs are not one-size-fits-all. We would like to ensure unique needs of 3-year-olds are met by curricula developed during expansion.

Additionally, educators caring for and educating 4-year-olds should be provided necessary professional development and coaching to ensure their practices can meet the needs of 3-year-olds. Just as we would want a teacher transitioning from one grade level to another to get support, we would want the same for our prekindergarten educators. It's critical that **any expansion of the EOEL Public Prekindergarten include these professional supports.**

Additionally, 3-year-olds' bodies function in different ways than 4-year-olds. For example, by 4 years old, we want to see 4-year-olds able to go to the bathroom on their own. That is not the case with 3-year-olds. It is not uncommon or developmentally inappropriate for a 3-year-old to still need toileting or diapering assistance. Hawai'i's public schools have often served elementary students well, but they were not designed for learners as young as 3 years old. **We urge any expansion of EOEL Public Prekindergarten to 3-year-olds to include investments that ensure classroom and outdoor spaces are designed specifically for these little learners.**

Finally, we would be remiss not to mention that as this committee considers expansion of the EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program, **we urge you to contemplate how this program provides meaningful access to families who are most in need.** Most families need full-day services, year-round so they can work. The EOEL program operates from 8:00 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. with no summer programming. Community-based preschool programs typically open as early as 6:30a and remain open as late as 5:30 p.m. We would suggest committee members consider establishing pilots for A+ programs and transportation services designed specifically for 3- and 4-year-olds.

We thank you for the opportunity to provide extensive comments on HB961. 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



Date: February 1, 2023

To: House Committee on Human Services
Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Support for HB961, 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, 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.

We also note that the potential expansion of eligibility for EOEL's public prekindergarten program to 3-year-olds would require some modification of existing classrooms and practices to bring them into alignment with developmentally-appropriate health, safety and quality standards and respectfully request consideration for the additional supports and resources that may be required to implement these adjustments.

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



Committee on Education
Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Representative, Terez Amato, Vice Chair

February 2, 2023

Dear Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Terez, and Members of the Committee,

We support HB 961, 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 John M. Mizuno, Chair
Representative Terez Amato, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Robert G. Peters, Chair
Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: **Measure:** H.B. No. 961 – RELATING EARLY LEARNING
Hearing Date: Thursday, February 2, 2023
Time: 9:00 am
Location: Conference Room 329

EARLY LEARNING BOARD POSITION: COMMENTS

The Early Learning Board meets next Thursday (February 9, 2023) when decisions about legislative testimony will be addressed. Therefore, as the Board Chair, I am only offering comments about this bill as it relates to the Board's policy framework for 2023.

H.B. No. 961 appears to be aligned 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.

Pursuant to Act 046, SLH 2020, EOEL is working collaboratively across stakeholders, including DHS, HIDOE, and the Hawaii 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. Section 4 of this bill would amend section 302 L-7 to also serve three-year-olds.

If the EOEL is to expand access to preschool as outlined in H.B. No. 961 to implement program changes required by previous acts, the ELB defers to the EOEL expertise and respectfully requests the Legislature to approve the recommendations and related appropriations required to offer optimal learning environments for three-year-olds.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on this bill. The ELB appreciates the commitment of the Legislature to support the expansion of early care and learning opportunities for our *keiki*.

HB-961

Submitted on: 2/1/2023 9:59:39 AM

Testimony for HUS on 2/2/2023 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raya Esteban	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Amato and committee members,

Please support HB961, which has the potential to expand Preschool Open Doors (POD)—both in funding and to include 3-year olds.

High-quality early care and education benefit children, families, employers, and society—both today and in the future. Extensive brain science research emphasizes the importance of the first few years of a child’s life. Decades of research have shown that quality interactions between young children and their competent educators are critical for supporting the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young children. In addition, without accessible quality early care and education services, many parents would not be able to report to work, attend training, or address family and personal needs. This can have drastic consequences on the well-being of children, families, and the economy. Businesses would miss the opportunity to recruit and retain talented employees because of the lack of quality early care and education services for their employees. The bottom line is that life without these services causes stress not just on parents and families, but on businesses and the economy as a whole.

As it is, there is limited financial assistance for families to access child care in Hawai‘i, which has serious repercussions on children's learning and growth, parents' ability to go to work, and employers' ability to retain staff who have young children. We must ensure that more families receive financial support for child care, and expanding POD would be a huge step in the right direction.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Raya Esteban

HB-961

Submitted on: 2/1/2023 5:30:29 PM

Testimony for HUS on 2/2/2023 9:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Amato, and Members of the Committee on Human Services, I am requesting the Committee consider revising Section 346-184, Hawaii Revised Statutes, by adding the **Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI)** as an accrediting organization or by exempting providers with ACSI accreditation from this section.

Families need fair access to faith-based providers.

Children with developmental disabilities require equal access to programs and not be limited by age criteria.

Children who turn five years old in August face three full years of preschool. Our laws must allow for flexibility for when a child may enter kindergarten, and choose IDEA early intervention and special education programs.

Protect our families' choices and freedom from religious and disability discrimination.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.