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A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE PRESCHOOL OPEN DOORS PROGRAM.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The purpose of this Act is to explicitly  
2 establish that the priority of selection for the preschool open  
3 doors program participation shall apply only to the priority  
4 application period between February 1 and the start of each  
5 program year. The program year is the same as the state fiscal  
6 year. Complete applications that meet program rules established  
7 pursuant to chapter 91, Hawaii Revised Statutes, and that are  
8 received after the start of the program year and through January  
9 31 of each year shall be considered on a first-come, first-  
10 served basis for the balance of the program year. This will  
11 ensure that the preschool open doors program maximizes the  
12 funding appropriated to the program to serve the greatest number  
13 of three- and four-year-old children in a more timely fashion.

14           SECTION 2. Section 346-181, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
15 amended by amending subsection (b) to read as follows:

16           "(b) Subject to the availability of funds, the program  
17 shall serve three- and four-year-old children who are in the two

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1 years prior to kindergarten entry pursuant to section 302A-411,  
2 with priority extended in the following order [to:] during a  
3 priority application period established for each upcoming  
4 program year:

5 (1) Children who are not eligible to attend public school  
6 kindergarten in the calendar year in which they turn  
7 five years of age because their birth date occurs  
8 after the kindergarten eligibility date pursuant to  
9 section 302A-411;

10 (2) Underserved or at-risk four-year-old children who were  
11 previously served as a three-year-old child, as defined  
12 by rules adopted by the department;

13 (3) Four-year-old children who were previously served as a  
14 three-year-old child;

15 (4) Four-year-old children;

16 (5) Underserved or at-risk three-year-old children, as  
17 defined by rules adopted by the department; and

18 (6) Three-year-old children[-];

19 provided that applications received after the end of the  
20 priority application period and through January 31 of each year  
21 will be processed on a first-come, first-served basis for the

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1 remainder of that program year. For purposes of this section,  
2 "program year" means the state fiscal year."

3 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed  
4 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

5 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

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INTRODUCED BY: \_\_\_\_\_

*Sam*

8

BY REQUEST

JAN 22 2024

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**Report Title:**

Department of Human Services; Preschool Open Doors Program

**Description:**

Establishes that the priority of selection for program participation shall be applicable through the priority application period that occurs prior to the start of each program year. Applications received after the start of the program year through January 31 will be processed continuously through the program year on a first-come, first-served basis. Effective upon approval.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

JUSTIFICATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Human Services

TITLE: A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO THE PRESCHOOL OPEN DOORS PROGRAM.

PURPOSE: To establish that for each Preschool Open Doors program year, the priority for program participation selection shall apply only through the priority application period and to allow applications submitted after the priority period through January 31 to be approved on a first-come, first-served basis. This change will preserve the Legislature's intent to prioritize program applications, reduce the likelihood of waitlists, increase accessibility to school readiness programs, and allow the Department to maximize the use of the Preschool Open Doors program's appropriation.

MEANS: Amend section 346-181(b), Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS).

JUSTIFICATION: In 2023, the Legislature expanded the Preschool Open Doors program to serve three-year-old children (Act 171, Session Laws of Hawaii (SLH) 2023). The 2023 Legislature approved a substantial increase to the Preschool Open Doors program appropriation (Act 164, SLH 2023) from \$11.6 million to \$38 million, effective July 1, 2024. The appropriation increases the number of children the program can serve and provides for increased child care subsidy amounts.

The proposed amendment will preserve the prioritization process for the Preschool Open Doors priority application period and allow eligible applications received thereafter to be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Allowing the Department to process applications on a first-come, first-served basis after the priority period closes will allow a continuous enrollment process throughout the program year and

allow more children to access a school readiness program without delay.

Currently, prioritizing applications during each application period requires a start and end date for applications to be submitted and received by the Department, time to apply the priority selection criteria to the applicant pool, notifying eligible families, and then initiating the process that eventually results in approving and issuing child care payments. Typically, this results in a 1- to 2-month period after the application period ends before the next application period starts.

Explicitly identifying that the priority selection criteria apply only to the priority application period preserves the prioritization process and will speed up the review and approval of applications received after the priority period ends. This will allow faster access to Preschool Open Doors program subsidies and increase participation in a school readiness program. More participation in a school readiness program, especially by children of families with low- and moderate-income, will positively impact kindergarten readiness.

Impact on the public: The bill will allow income-eligible families identified as priority populations to continue to benefit from the prioritization process, and more families will be able to access child care subsidies and school readiness programs throughout the program year.

Impact on the department and other agencies:  
Provides clarity to the Department in its  
use of the priority selection criteria.

GENERAL FUND: None.

OTHER FUNDS: None.

PPBS PROGRAM  
DESIGNATION: HMS 305.

OTHER AFFECTED  
AGENCIES: None.

EFFECTIVE DATE: Upon approval.