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KE KIA'ĀINA



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KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 24, 2024

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

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2427 HD1 – RELATING TO THE PRESCHOOL OPEN DOORS PROGRAM.**

Hearing: Monday, February 26, 2024, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) strongly supports this administration measure. This proposal provides DHS with the ability to allow income-eligible families identified as priority populations to continue to benefit from the prioritization selection process for Preschool Open Doors. Importantly, it allows more families to be able to access child care subsidies and school readiness programs more expeditiously.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this bill specifies that the priority of selection for Preschool Open Doors Program participation applies only during the priority application period between February 1 and the start of each program year. Specifies that applications received after the priority application period shall be processed on a first-come, first-served basis. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1). The measure was amended by:

- (1) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

The proposed amendment will preserve the prioritization process for the Preschool Open Doors priority application period and allow the Department to process eligible applications received thereafter 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 change 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.

These changes will also support the Department's implementation of Act 171, Session Laws of Hawaii (SLH) 2023, which expanded the Preschool Open Doors program to include 3-year-old children, and Act 164, SLH 2023, (the biennium budget bill) that increased appropriations for child care subsidies.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.



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

February 24, 2024

TO: Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair
Senator Sharon Y. Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

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

SUBJECT: Measure: S.B. No. 2474 S.D. 1 – RELATING TO FAMILY LEAVE

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) is committed to enhancing systems of support for families across the State with young children. Our office supports S.B. No. 2474 S.D. 1 and defers to the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations (DLIR) regarding implementation.

We know that high-quality early learning experiences at the youngest years of a child's life are critical for their growth and development, contributing to life-long success and wellbeing. Bonding and fostering nurturing attachment between caregivers and children are a crucial aspect of these early learning experiences.

We also know many of Hawai'i's families either face economic hardship or are on the brink of doing so. When needing to care for a newborn or a family member, Hawai'i's families simply cannot afford to take unpaid leave.

Our office is committed to protecting early learning opportunities for families and their children, and as such, we strongly promote policies such as paid family leave, which allows families the ability to meaningfully connect with their keiki without interfering with their employment and ensuring financial stability.

EOEL appreciates the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.



Date: February 24, 2024

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

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Support for **HB2427 HD1**, Relating to the Preschool Open Doors Program

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 supports passage of HB2427 HD1, which establishes application of selection priorities for program participation in Preschool Open Doors (POD) through the annual POD application period that occurs prior to the program year, and continuous enrollment on a first-come, first-served basis once the program year has started.

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. POD provides key financial assistance to enable children to attend preschool, and ensuring quick and robust enrollment of children in POD is pivotal to ensuring as many children as possible benefit from quality early learning experiences that will prepare them for kindergarten and later success in school and life.

HB2427 HD1 establishes a reasonable and appropriate balance between 1) honoring key priorities in the selection of POD participants to serve children with the greatest need factors and to ensure continuity of care to support children's development; and 2) expediting enrollment, ensuring efficient expenditure of funds, and maximizing the number of children served through the program.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony **in support of HB2427 HD1**.



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

February 26, 2024

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee,

We support HB 2427 HD1, which specifies that the priority of selection for preschool open doors program participation applies only during the priority application period between February 1 and the start of each program year. The bill also specifies that applications received after the priority application period shall be processed on a first-come, first-served basis.

We support all approaches to increase access to quality early learning seats in our system. Preschool Open Doors is an effective program that helps families have access to quality early learning opportunities. This administrative change will allow more children to participate in the program.

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 for this measure represents at least a 75% consensus of our voting membership.

Sincerely,

Cheri Nakamura
HE'E Coalition Director



Coalition Members and Participants

Academy 21

Alliance for Place Based Learning

American Civil Liberties Union

Atherton YMCA

Education Institute of Hawai'i

*Faith Action for Community Equity

Fresh Leadership LLC

Girl Scouts Hawai'i

*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 Education Association

Hawai'i Nutrition and Physical Activity Coalition

* Hawai'i State PTSA

Hawai'i State Student Council

Hawai'i State Teachers Association

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*

To: House Committee on Finance

Re: HB 2427 HD 1 – IN STRONG SUPPORT

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 308

February 26, 2024; 10:00AM

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Kitagawa, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to testify in **STRONG SUPPORT of House Bill 2427 HD 1 relating to the Preschool Open Doors Program.**

Preserving the prioritization process for the Preschool Open Doors Program's priority application period while introducing a first-come, first-served approach for subsequent eligible applications allows for more of Hawai'i's families to benefit from this much-needed program. The passing of this bill and subsequent implementation will increase school readiness program participation, allow more families to access child care subsidies throughout the year, and positively impact three- and four-year old's readiness to enter kindergarten.

This thoughtful approach promotes inclusivity and accessibility and is a meaningful step towards meeting the diverse needs of families seeking quality preschool education. This strategic adjustment to the enrollment process reduces barriers to entry for low- and moderate-income families in a way that is more efficient and equitable.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony on this critical issue. **Please pass HB 2427 HD 1.**

Mahalo,

Chevelle Davis, MPH

Director of Early Childhood & Health Policy