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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
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 1, 2024

To: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 3116 – RELATING TO THE PRESCHOOL OPEN DOORS PROGRAM.**

Hearing: Monday, February 5, 2024, 1:02 p.m.
Conference Room 225, 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 is to establish 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 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), which 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 2, 2024

TO: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

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

SUBJECT: **Measure:** S.B. No. 3116 – RELATING TO THE PRESCHOOL OPEN DOORS PROGRAM
Hearing Date: Thursday, February 5, 2024
Time: 1:02 pm
Location: Conference Room 225

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) supports S.B. No. 3116 and defers to the Department of Human Services regarding implementation.

EOEL is committed to ensuring all keiki have access to high quality early learning. As part of this work, the State continues to focus on enhancing free or affordable opportunities and the Preschool Open Doors program is an effective way that families have been able to access childcare opportunities that best meet their needs.

This measure would maximize the funding appropriated in a way that would continue to ensure families who face some of the most significant barriers will continue to receive priority at the start of the application period and then on a first-come first-served basis thereafter, allowing the program to serve the greatest number of three- and four-year-old children timely.

We thank the Legislature for making significant investments into the Preschool Open Doors programs so that more families can be eligible for more meaningful assistance. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this measure.

Date: February 1, 2024

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Support for **SB3116**, 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 SB3116, 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.

SB3116 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 SB3116**.

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: SB 3116 – in strong support

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 225

February 5, 2024; 1:02PM

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, 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 Senate Bill 3116 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 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 childcare 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 important issue. **Please pass SB 3116.**

Mahalo,

Chevelle Davis, MPH

Director of Early Childhood & Health Policy

LATE



Committee on Health and Human Services
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry Aquino, Vice Chair

February 5, 2024

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee,

We support SB 3116, which 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-com 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*