

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i

March 22, 2024

Committee: Senate Health and Human Services
Time: 1:00 PM
Location: State Capitol Conference Room 225
Re: SCR 175/SR 151

Aloha e Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i hui, we are writing in **support** of SCR 175 and SR 151 requesting the Department of Human Services to report on the cultural and therapeutic services provided by community-based organizations at the Kawaiiloa Youth and Family Wellness Center.

Hawai‘i’s Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander youth are overrepresented at every stage of the justice system, with challenges rooted in the history of our islands. By advancing an indigenous model rooted in Hawaiian knowledge and cultural practices, re-engaging with elders, and reconnecting to the land and community, the community-based organizations providing services at the Kawaiiloa campus help youth to heal, recognizing their promise as positive community contributors.

The efforts of the community-based organizations at the Kawaiiloa campus were recognized by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Lever for Change as one of five global finalists of the Racial Equity 2030 challenge, an open call for bold solutions to drive an equitable future for children, families, and communities worldwide. The Challenge awarded an eight-year grant for the project, “Kawaiiloa: a Transformative Indigenous Model to Replace Youth Incarceration”, to help build and scale actionable ideas for transformative change in the systems and institutions that uphold racial inequities. Understanding the work of these organizations and their impact on youth in Hawaii will be beneficial to the legislature in its own efforts to address the youth justice system.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth homelessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

Please support SCR 175 and SR 151

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