
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO CHILD ABUSE.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that most experts agree
2 child neglect occurs when the needs of a child are unmet by
3 their primary caregivers. Inadequate clothing, food, shelter,
4 medical and emotional care, along with unsafe environments,
5 exposure to substance abuse, and lack of supervision, can
6 constitute neglect. The legislature further finds that poverty
7 and child neglect are highly correlated and often impact
8 families simultaneously, but poverty does not cause neglect.
9 Poverty may prevent a parent or legal guardian from providing
10 adequate food, clothing, shelter, care, or supervision to their
11 children; however, incapacity to provide is not the same as an
12 unwillingness to provide. The legislature also finds that under
13 existing law, the failure to provide a child with these needs
14 qualifies as child abuse or neglect, even in cases where a
15 parent or legal guardian may lack the financial ability to
16 provide.



1 The legislature additionally finds that although the
2 department of human services does not currently remove children
3 from their homes solely on the basis of poverty, it is important
4 to statutorily recognize that conditions of poverty alone do not
5 fall within the definition of "child abuse or neglect".

6 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to amend the
7 definition of "child abuse or neglect" by clarifying that the
8 failure to provide certain needs to a child constitutes child
9 abuse or neglect only if the person or entity responsible for
10 the care of the child is financially able to provide and fails
11 to do so or is offered financial or other reasonable means to
12 provide and fails to accept these offers.

13 SECTION 2. Section 350-1, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
14 amended by amending the definition of "child abuse or neglect"
15 to read as follows:

16 ""Child abuse or neglect" means:

17 (1) The acts or omissions of any person who, or legal
18 entity which, is in any manner or degree related to
19 the child, is residing with the child, or is otherwise
20 responsible for the child's care, that have resulted
21 in the physical or psychological health or welfare of



1 the child, who is under the age of eighteen, to be
2 harmed, or to be subject to any reasonably
3 foreseeable, substantial risk of being harmed. The
4 acts or omissions are indicated for the purposes of
5 reports by circumstances that include but are not
6 limited to:

7 (A) When the child exhibits evidence of:

8 (i) Substantial or multiple skin bruising or any
9 other internal bleeding;

10 (ii) Any injury to skin causing substantial
11 bleeding;

12 (iii) Malnutrition;

13 (iv) Failure to thrive;

14 (v) Burn or burns;

15 (vi) Poisoning;

16 (vii) Fracture of any bone;

17 (viii) Subdural hematoma;

18 (ix) Soft tissue swelling;

19 (x) Extreme pain;

20 (xi) Extreme mental distress;

21 (xii) Gross degradation; or



1 (xiii) Death; and

2 such injury is not justifiably explained, or when
3 the history given concerning such condition or
4 death is at variance with the degree or type of
5 such condition or death, or circumstances
6 indicate that such condition or death may not be
7 the product of an accidental occurrence;

8 (B) When the child has been the victim of sexual
9 contact or conduct, including but not limited to
10 sexual assault as defined in the Penal Code,
11 molestation, sexual fondling, incest, or
12 prostitution; obscene or pornographic
13 photographing, filming, or depiction; or other
14 similar forms of sexual exploitation, including
15 but not limited to acts that constitute an
16 offense pursuant to section 712-1202(1)(b);

17 (C) When there exists injury to the psychological
18 capacity of a child as is evidenced by an
19 observable and substantial impairment in the
20 child's ability to function;



1 (D) When the child is not provided in a timely manner
2 with adequate food, clothing, shelter,
3 psychological care, physical care, medical care,
4 or supervision[+] and the person who, or legal
5 entity which, is in any manner or degree related
6 to the child, is residing with the child, or is
7 otherwise responsible for the child's care, is:

8 (i) Financially able to provide and fails to do
9 so; or

10 (ii) Offered financial or other reasonable means
11 to provide and fails to accept such offers;

12 (E) When the child is provided with dangerous,
13 harmful, or detrimental drugs as defined by
14 section 712-1240; provided that this subparagraph
15 shall not apply when such drugs are provided to
16 the child pursuant to the direction or
17 prescription of a practitioner, as defined in
18 section 712-1240; or

19 (F) When the child has been the victim of labor
20 trafficking under chapter 707; or



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1 (2) The acts or omissions of any person that have resulted
2 in sex trafficking or severe forms of trafficking in
3 persons; provided that no finding by the department
4 pursuant to this chapter shall be used as conclusive
5 evidence that a person has committed an offense under
6 part VIII of chapter 707 or section 712-1202."

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

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

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INTRODUCED BY:



JAN 16 2025



H.B. NO. 239

Report Title:

Child Abuse; Neglect; Financial Ability

Description:

Amends the definition of "child abuse or neglect" by clarifying that the failure to provide certain needs to a child constitutes child abuse or neglect only if the person or entity responsible for the care of the child is financially able to provide and fails to do so or is offered financial or other reasonable means to provide and fails to accept these offers.

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