

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
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

March 15, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 613 HD1 – RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH.**

Hearing: March 17, 2025, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225, & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure, which is now like administration measure HB1101. DHS defers to the Office of Youth Services regarding its resource needs and offers comments.

PURPOSE: This bill makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1).

DHS appreciates the Committee on Human Services & Homelessness' amendments:

- (1) Inserting language to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent program within the Office of Youth Services;
- (2) Replacing the appropriation to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth throughout the State with an appropriation to fund the permanent Safe Spaces for Youth Program within the Office of Youth Services;
- (3) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (4) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

In its committee report, the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness included appropriation requests of \$841,016 for fiscal year 2025-2026 and \$871,016 for fiscal year 2026-2027, and we defer to the Office of Youth Services on the appropriation amount.

OYS is implementing the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program authorized by Act 130, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022 (Act 130). Act 130 will be repealed on June 30, 2025, and this measure codifies the Safe Spaces for Youth Program in Hawaii Revised Statutes.

Since Act 130 passed, OYS has moved forward with implementing the Safe Spaces for Youth program that aims to establish Safe Spaces homeless youth shelters in each county and the Safe Place Network access points. The Safe Spaces homeless shelters will work with the Safe Place Network access points identified in the community, where youth and young adults up to age 24 can enter and ask for assistance. With additional funding, OYS is poised to work with communities to establish additional shelter for young adults ages 18-24 and Safe Place sites.

According to the National Network for Youth, communities with established Safe Spaces for homeless youth report higher success rates in terms of improved housing stability, increased school enrollment, and a reduction in risky behaviors. By making the Safe Spaces for Youth program permanent, Hawaii can continue to build upon the pilot's progress and ensure the safety and stability of at-risk youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this measure.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



LEANNE GILLESPIE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LUNA HO'OKELE

Phone: (808) 587-5710
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STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES
KE'ENA LAWELAWE 'ŌPIO
1010 Richards Street, Suite 314
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

March 14, 2025

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

FROM: Leanne Gillespie, Executive Director

SUBJECT: HB 613 HD1 – RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH
Hearing: March 17, 2025, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Office of Youth Services (OYS) strongly supports this bill and offers comments.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth and make permanent the Safe Spaces program, within the Department of Human Services, Office of Youth Services.

The Department of Human Services, Office of Youth Services continue to work to expand and improve existing programs that provide shelter and programs to homeless youth. Act 130 (SLH 2022) Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program requires the Office of Youth Services to open youth homeless shelters in each county over a three-year period. This program is due to sunset 6/30/2025.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AGENCY

During the three-year pilot project, the Office of Youth Services has worked with both government and community-based organizations to build a robust and comprehensive program plan for the Safe Spaces Program that expects to make meaningfully progress in reducing youth homelessness across the State.

The minimum cost to operate one emergency shelter, with the services listed above, is estimated at approximately \$800,000 annually. Variance in costs depends on location, facility expenses, staffing and services offered. With minor children not being allowed to shelter with young adults, Act 130 includes the requirement to open eight shelters, two in each County: Oahu, Hawaii, Maui and Kauai for a total estimated cost of \$6,400,000, not including staffing and administrative and program planning and implementation costs, estimated at an additional \$600,000.

OYS originally requested \$4,496,870 to fund two shelters on Oahu, and one on each of the islands of Maui, Hawaii and Kauai and support other programmatic and administrative costs including two positions. OYS received \$600,000 in FY23, FY24 \$868,556 in FY24, and \$871,016 in FY25.

During year one of the Safe Spaces Pilot Project, OYS gathered an inventory of shelter beds, conducted research, and gathered input from community organizations and the needs of homeless youth across the state. The OYS gathered state agencies together to further discuss the needs of youth and this program, including how to collect and share data for emergency shelters that would be opened under this program. With inadequate funding to procure a contract to open a new shelter, OYS increased several of its current residential Safe House and shelter contracts to quickly add bed space, in the form of available nights, to the then inventory.

During year two of this project, OYS developed a robust and comprehensive Safe Spaces program plan, contracted with the Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN) to develop, and implement the National Safe Place Network's Safe Places, as a component of Hawaii's Safe

Spaces Pilot Project. In March 2024, HYSN in partnership with OYS and the National Safe Place Network, gathered stakeholders from around the state together to discuss the problems of, and solutions to, youth homelessness.

During year three, the final year of this project, HYSN received its Safe Place license and local sites were trained and certified as Safe Places to assist minors in need of help. Safe Spaces was officially launched in late Summer 2024 with a Press Release by the Department of Human Services, Office of Youth Services. This press release educated the community about the new Safe Place sites, indicated by a yellow sign, where youth could enter and receive immediate help. These sites included The Salvation Army Family Intervention Services shelter in Hilo and Hale Kipa shelter on Oahu. Phone numbers and a text option for 24/7 response were also activated and available for youth who need assistance. The TXT 4 HELP option is provided as part of the National Safe Place Network's national line. Local phone numbers are provided by subcontract to The Salvation Army on Hawaii Island and Hale Kipa on Oahu.

Safe Spaces Performance Deliverables	Number
Safe Place Site Recruitment/Training	12
Education & Outreach Presentations	164
Number of Youth Receiving Safe Place Text-4-Help cards	125
Media Coverage	1 press release, 2 live interviews
Website and Social Media	159 website hits, 1200 Facebook fans, 5 Instagram posts
Safe Place Encounters*	
Text4Help	25
Safe Place Sites	0

*Program has been expanding since inception and is in place to begin accepting youth at Safe Place access sites and Safe Space shelters.

OYS continues to contract with HYSN who continued to recruit additional Safe Place sites and provide education, training, and outreach to build and strengthen this program.

In 2021, prior to this project, OYS' budget was reduced. To cover this reduction, OYS was received \$832,500 in COVID-19 relief funds. In 2024, the legislature allocated non-reoccurring funding to cover the ending COVID-19 relief fundings and reinstate the 2021 budget

loss. These funds give support for Safe House contracts, providing extended safe and secure housing for minors who are unable to return home. Safe Houses also receive Safe Spaces funding to provide emergency shelter for homeless youth. Both as non-reoccurring, these funds are due to end June 30, 2025. OYS may potentially have a \$1,632,500 budget reduction for youth homelessness effective FY26.

Estimated funding needed to fully implement Safe Spaces statewide:

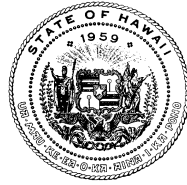
Safe Spaces Program Activity	Annual Estimated Cost
Licensed Minor Shelter on Oahu and Kauai*	\$800,000 ea = \$1,600,000
Young Adult Shelter on Oahu, Hawaii, Maui, Kauai	\$800,000 ea = \$3,200,000
Safe Place 24/7 Response	Oahu = \$181,000 Hawaii, Maui, Kauai (\$85,000 ea) = \$255,000
Safe Place Administration Costs	\$100,000
OYS Children & Youth Program Specialist Position	\$71,016
Safe Houses emergency shelter beds	\$832,500
Total	\$6,239,516

*In the last two years, a minor shelter was opened on Maui and Hawaii Island.

The OYS respectfully requests a general budget appropriation of \$1,691,516 for FY26 to maintain the current program services, including one program specialist position, in FY26. These are not additional funds. OYS is further requesting additional funds of \$6,239,516 effective FY27 to expand the program statewide. These services will be procured during FY26. In lieu of full funding beginning FY27, the OYS respectfully requests to maintain the FY26 project funding of \$1,691,516 through FY27.

OYS respectfully requests that any general fund appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executed budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and offer comments.



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
P. O. Box 3378
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB613 HD1
RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH**

SENATOR JOY A. SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: March 17, 2025

Room Number: 225

- 1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) Child and Adolescent Mental
- 2 Health Division supports making the Safe Spaces for Youth program a permanent part of the
- 3 Office of Youth Services.
- 4 Homelessness among youth is a crisis that puts them at greater risk for mental health struggles,
- 5 exploitation, and barriers to education and employment. Without intervention, these young
- 6 people often face significant challenges transitioning into adulthood. However, with the right
- 7 support – such as safe housing, behavioral health services, and job training – they can break the
- 8 cycle of homelessness and thrive.
- 9 Programs like this one that provide shelter and supportive services have been shown to reduce
- 10 homelessness, improve well-being and help young people become productive and self-sufficient
- 11 members of the community.
- 12 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

JON N. IKENAGA
STATE PUBLIC DEFENDER

DEFENDER COUNCIL
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
SUITE A-254
HONOLULU, HAWAI'I 96817

HONOLULU OFFICE
1130 NORTH NIMITZ HIGHWAY
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DISTRICT COURT DIVISION
TEL. No. (808) 586-2100

FAMILY COURT DIVISION
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STATE OF HAWAI'I
OFFICE OF THE PUBLIC DEFENDER

HAYLEY Y.C. CHENG
ASSISTANT PUBLIC DEFENDER

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**Testimony of the Office of the Public Defender,
State of Hawai'i to the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**

March 17, 2025

H.B. 613 HD1: RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH.

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

The Office of the Public Defender **strongly supports H.B. 613 HD1.**

The Office of the Public Defender works with youth involved in the criminal justice system. We have seen an increase in youth experiencing homelessness. We agree that we can do better as a community to help and provide supportive and safety services to our youth experiencing homelessness across the State of Hawaii. Our homeless youth need help with basic needs, access to education, access to transportation, access to mental health services, access to a safe and secure place to live, access to substance abuse treatment, and access to basic health care. We need more outreach options and shelter options with skilled and caring providers. These needs impact every Island in our State. In particular, we are concerned that if these services are not available and these needs are not met on our Neighbor Islands, then children who end up in our criminal justice system will end up in detention on the Island of Oahu – far from access to family and their home island support systems – thus exacerbating trauma and disenfranchisement for homeless youth. We submit that developing and providing safe spaces for our homeless youth can only help lift up youth and families in distress and can prevent youth from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

Hawai'i State Association of Counties (HSAC)

Counties of Kaua'i, Maui, Hawai'i, and City & County of Honolulu

Website: hawaiicounties.org | Email: hsac@hawaiicounties.org



Testimony of the Hawai'i State Association of Counties

H.B. No. 613 HD1 - Support

Relating to Housing

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Monday, March 17, 2025, 1:00 p.m.

The Hawai'i State Association of Counties (HSAC) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony in **support** of HB 613 HD1, which seeks to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent program within the Office of Youth Services and provide necessary funding for shelter and support services for homeless youth.

HSAC is a nonprofit organization representing Hawai'i's four counties: Kaua'i, Maui, Hawai'i, and the City & County of Honolulu. HSAC's membership includes all county council members, who collaborate to advocate for policies that improve the quality of life for our residents.

Youth homelessness is a pressing issue across all of our counties, leaving many young people without stable housing, access to education, or the support systems needed. Without proper intervention, homeless youth are at risk of exploitation, physical harm, mental health challenges, and difficulty securing employment or continuing their education. Dedicated resources for unaccompanied minors and young adults is a much needed area of support.

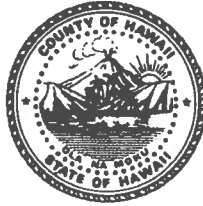
The Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program, established under Act 130 (SLH 2022), has made significant strides in providing shelter and critical services for vulnerable youth. HB 613 HD1 will ensure that this program continues permanently, allowing the Office of Youth Services to expand shelter capacity, strengthen partnerships with community organizations, and provide consistent, long-term support to youth in need.

By passing this measure, the Legislature will help ensure that youth experiencing homelessness have access to a safe, stable environment where they can receive the guidance and resources necessary to build a better future. Mahalo to the committee for hearing this measure.

C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor

William V. Brilhante Jr.
Managing Director

Merrick Nishimoto
Deputy Managing Director



Kehaulani M. Costa
Housing Administrator

Keiko M. Mercado
Assistant Housing Administrator

County of Hawai'i
Office of Housing and Community Development

1990 Kino'ole Street, Suite 102 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720 • (808) 961-8379 • Fax (808) 961-8685
Existing Housing: (808) 959-4642 • Fax (808) 959-9308
Kona: (808) 323-4300 • Fax (808) 323-4301

March 14, 2025

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 613, HD1
A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Sen. Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Sen. Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Hearing Date: Monday, March 17, 2025, at 1:00 PM

Place of Hearing: Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Aloha Honorable Chairs San Buenaventura and Aquino, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

On behalf of the County of Hawai'i Office of Housing and Community Development (OHCD), I am pleased to provide testimony in **strong support** of **House Bill 613, HD1**, which makes permanent the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program within the Office of Youth Services.

This bill's establishment of a permanent Safe Spaces for Youth program within the Office of Youth Services is critical for providing stability and support to one of our most vulnerable populations.

Currently, many homeless youth — particularly those who are unaccompanied — face significant challenges, including mental health issues, lack of access to education, and risk of exploitation. The pilot program, established under Act 130, has already demonstrated success in improving housing stability, increasing school enrollment, and reducing risky behaviors. By making this program permanent, we can expand its reach and impact, ensuring that more youth receive the necessary support and services they need to transition out of homelessness and move toward a brighter future.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 613, HD1.

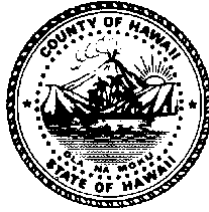
Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kehaulani".

Kehaulani M. Costa
Housing Administrator



C. Kimo Alameda, Ph.D.
Mayor



William V. Brillhante, Jr.
Managing Director

Merrick Nishimoto
Deputy Managing Director

County of Hawai'i ~ Office of the Mayor

25 Aupuni Street, Suite 2603 • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720 • Phone (808) 961-8211 • Fax (808) 961-6553
KONA: 74-5044 Ane Keohokālole Hwy., Bldg C • Kailua-Kona, Hawai'i 96740
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TO: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

FROM: C. Kimo Alameda, PhD., Mayor

DATE: March 13, 2025

SUBJECT: **TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT TO HOUSE BILL 613 HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH**

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and esteemed members of the Committee,

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support** for House Bill 613 HD1, which seeks to establish a permanent Safe Spaces for Youth Program within the Office of Youth Services and provide funding for shelters and services in each county for homeless youth in Hawai'i.

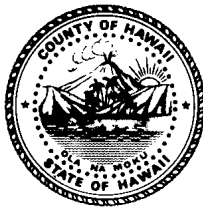
Youth homelessness is a growing crisis in Hawai'i, with at least 1 in 30 adolescents (ages 13-17) and 1 in 10 young adults (ages 18-25) experiencing homelessness each year. Without stable housing and support, these young adults face increased risk of criminal activity, and serious mental health struggles. Making the Safe Spaces for Youth Program permanent is a crucial step toward addressing this crisis.

1. **Rising Youth Homelessness** – Many young people face homelessness due to family conflict, abuse, financial hardship, or aging out of foster care. Without stable housing, they are at high risk of exploitation, crime, and mental health issues.
2. **Lack of Safe Alternatives** – Shelters for adults often do not accommodate youth-specific needs. Young people need spaces that provide safety, guidance, and appropriate age support.
3. **Education & Employment Barriers** – Homeless youth struggle to attend school or maintain jobs without stable housing. A shelter can provide stability, allowing them to pursue education and employment opportunities.

4. **Mental & Physical Health Risks** – Many homeless youths suffer from untreated trauma, mental illness, or substance abuse. Access to a shelter with healthcare, counseling, and rehabilitation services can significantly improve their well-being.
5. **Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness** – Early intervention is key to preventing long-term homelessness. Providing safe housing and support can help youth transition into independent living and prevent chronic homelessness in adulthood.

HB613 HD1 ensures that state, county agencies and nonprofit organizations, work together to identify and support homeless youth.

Mahalo, for your consideration of this critical issue.



HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL - DISTRICT 2

25 Aupuni Street • Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

DATE: March 12, 2025

TO: Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Jennifer Kagiwada, Council Member
Council District 2

SUBJECT: HB 613 HD1

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members,

I am writing in strong support of HB 613 HD1. This bill makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

The Safe Spaces for Youth Program requires the Office of Youth Services to open Safe Space youth homeless shelters in each County. During this three-year pilot program, the Office of Youth Services has worked with government agencies and community-based organizations to build a robust and comprehensive program for Safe Spaces which can help to reduce youth homelessness across the State.

The need in Hawai'i County for additional support is immense. Our Office of Housing and Community Development has tracked that the Homelessness and Housing Fund has served 1,006 keiki and youth under age 18, which amounts to one-third of the population these nonprofits have provided services for.

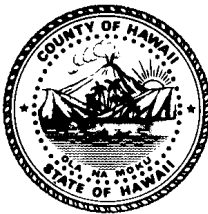
Safe Spaces for Youth has been a popular and widely supported program and this bill takes critical steps to make this much needed program permanent, which will provide emergency shelter and support to protect our vulnerable youth and help them transition to more stable futures. Please pass HB 613 HD1.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jenn Kagiwada", written in a cursive style.

Jenn Kagiwada

HEATHER L. KIMBALL
COUNCIL DISTRICT 1
(North Hilo, Hāmākua, and portion of
Waimea)



Phone: (808) 961-8828
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Email: Heather.Kimball@hawaiicounty.gov

HAWAI'I COUNTY COUNCIL

25 Aupuni Street, Ste. 1402.
Hilo, Hawai'i 96720

March 16, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Honorable Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Submission via online testimony only

RE: **Support of HB613 HD1**

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

As the representative of the Hawai'i County Council for District 1, I thank you for the opportunity to submit **testimony in SUPPORT of HB 613, HD1**, relating to the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program being made a permanent initiative within the Office of Youth Services, and provide necessary funding for its continued operation.

The Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program has already demonstrated its effectiveness in providing vulnerable youth with stability, resources, and opportunities for a brighter future. By securing permanent funding and program status, we can ensure that at-risk youth and young adults across the state have access to safe shelter, essential services, and long-term support.

With Act 130 set to be repealed on June 30, 2025, it is imperative that the Legislature acts now to make this program permanent. The Office of Youth Services has diligently planned and developed the program, and with appropriations, is ready to open the first state-funded shelter for young adults on Hawai'i Island. Investing in this vital program ensures that we continue to provide a pathway to stability and success for Hawai'i's most vulnerable youth.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony. If you would like to discuss my knowledge of this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Heather Kimball".

HEATHER L. KIMBALL



Where LGBTQIA+ Rights Meet the Labor Movement
A constituency group of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO

March 12, 2025

Senate's Committee on Health and Human Services
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Monday, March 17, 2025 at 1:00 PM

RE: STRONG SUPPORT for House Bill 613 HD 1

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice-Chair Aquino and fellow committee members,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i is an official chapter of [Pride at Work](#) which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQIA+ Community to further social and economic justice.

Pride at Work - Hawai'i strongly supports House Bill 613 HD 1, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services and appropriates funds to provide emergency shelter and services for unaccompanied homeless keiki. This legislation is a crucial step toward ensuring that vulnerable young individuals have access to the stability and support they need to avoid long-term homelessness.

Unaccompanied homeless keiki (especially those under the age of 18) are among the most at-risk members of our community, often facing homelessness due to family rejection, abuse, poverty, or aging out of foster care. Without immediate access to safe shelter and essential resources, these youth are at a heightened risk of exploitation, violence, and severe health challenges.

Research shows that homeless keiki are significantly more likely to become homeless adults without proper intervention. By making the Safe Spaces for Youth Program permanent and continuing to invest in emergency shelter and supportive services, we can interrupt this cycle and provide young people with the opportunities they need to build stable and independent futures.

Hawai'i has a responsibility to protect and support all of its residents, particularly our most vulnerable youth. House Bill 613 ensures that critical services remain available, creating long-term solutions to youth homelessness. By passing this bill, we reaffirm our commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and fostering a future where every young person has a place to call home. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

We urge the Committee to pass HB 613 and take this essential step toward addressing youth homelessness in Hawai'i.

In solidarity,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)
President
[Pride at Work – Hawai'i](#)



HAWAI'I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

Web site: <http://www.hysn.org> E-mail: info@hysn.org

Vonnell Ramos, President
Cyd Hoffeld, Vice President
Sione Ford Naeata, Treasurer
Greg Tjapkes, Secretary

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

Access to Independence
Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawai'i
Bobby Benson Center
Child and Family Service
Coalition for a Drug-Free Hawai'i
Domestic Violence Action Center
EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.
Friends of the Children's Justice
Center of Maui
Get Ready Hawai'i
Hale Kipa, Inc.
Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, Inc.
Hawai'i Children's Action
Network
Hawai'i Health & Harm
Reduction Center
Hawaii Island Community'
Health Center
Ho'ola Na Pua
Ho'okele Coalition of Kaua'i
Ka Hale Pomaika'i
Kokua Kalihi Valley
Kaua'i Planning and Action
Alliance
Lines for Life Youth Line
Maui Youth and Family Services
Na Pu'uwai Molokai Native
Hawaiian Health Care
Systems
P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.
Parents and Children Together
PHOCUSED
Piha Wellness and Healing
Planned Parenthood of the
Great Northwest, Hawaii
Alaska, Kentucky, Indiana
Residential Youth Services
& Empowerment (RYSE)
Salvation Army Family
Intervention Services
Sex Abuse Treatment Center
Susannah Wesley Community
Center
The Catalyst Group

March 12, 2025

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
And members of the Committee on Health and Human
Services

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613 HD1 RELATING TO **HOMELESS YOUTH**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, strongly supports HB 613 Relating to Homeless Youth.

Runaway and homeless youth are the most vulnerable segment of Hawaii's homeless population. They are children who have not completed their education, lack employment skills and experience, and need to learn the skills for adult living.

Young people run from abusive or neglectful families. They often have untreated mental health or substance abuse issues. And sometimes they are thrown out of their homes by the adults who are supposed to care for and protect them. Living on the street is difficult and dangerous and young people do not choose to do it for fun or adventure.

Homeless youth need street-based outreach, safe emergency shelter, family strengthening services to enable family reunifications, and transitional living services for youth and young adults who cannot be safely reunited with their families. Safe Spaces for Youth can ensure that short-term and longer-term safe and appropriate housing is available statewide.

One element of the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot project is the Safe Place Program. Any young person in crisis on Oahu or Hawaii Island can walk into a Safe Place site or text for help with 24-hour a day response. Hale Kipa, The Salvation Army Family Intervention Services, Parents and Children Together, Work Hawaii, Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawaii, and the Hawaii County Rapid Transit System are

among the organizations working together on this project. Without new funding from the legislature, 2 years of planning, training, and outreach will be lost if Safe Place ends on June 30th.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

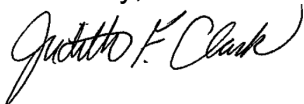
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith F. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Judith" being the most prominent.

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith F. Clark". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Judith" being the most prominent.

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



TESTIMONY FROM THE STONEWALL CAUCUS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAI'I

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

March 17, 2025

Testimony in Strong Support of House Bill 613 HD1 RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and esteemed Members of the Committee:

My name is Abby Simmons, Chair of the Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, and I am testifying on behalf of our Caucus in strong support of HB613 HD1, which seeks to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth across the State of Hawai'i.

Why This Bill is Critical

Hawaii's youth homelessness crisis is a growing concern. Research indicates that 1 in 10 young adults (ages 18-25) and 1 in 30 adolescents (ages 13-17) experience some form of homelessness annually without the support of a parent or guardian. These young individuals are among the most vulnerable in our state, facing challenges such as:

- Lack of basic necessities (food, safe shelter, medical care)
- Higher rates of mental health struggles (69% report mental health challenges)
- A history of state involvement (33% have been in foster care, 50% have been in the juvenile justice system)
- Disproportionate risks for LGBTQ+ youth (62% report physical harm while homeless)

Without intervention, these youth are at heightened risk for exploitation, trafficking, untreated illness, substance abuse, and even suicide.

How HB613 HD1 Provides a Solution

By appropriating funds to the Department of Human Services (DHS), HB613 HD1 ensures that emergency shelters and essential services will be provided on all major Hawaiian islands— Hawai'i, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai, and Oahu. This measure will:

1. Expand Safe Housing Options – Youth who have nowhere else to turn will have access to stable, short-term emergency shelters.
2. Improve Access to Supportive Services – Mental health care, substance abuse treatment, case management, and job training will help youth transition out of homelessness.
3. Prevent Further Harm – Providing structured support prevents young people from falling into dangerous situations, such as trafficking or crime.

A Moral and Economic Imperative

Investing in youth now prevents long-term societal costs, such as emergency medical expenses, law enforcement interventions, and chronic homelessness in adulthood. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on homeless prevention services, communities save \$3 to \$6 in future costs. HB613 HD1 is both the right and smart thing to do.

Every child deserves a safe place to sleep and a chance at a better future. By passing HB613 HD1, we take a vital step toward protecting Hawaii's unaccompanied homeless youth and providing them with the support they need to thrive.

I urge you to pass HB613 HD1 and ensure that no child in our state is left without shelter or hope.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Abby Simmons (she/her)
Chair & SCC Representative
Stonewall Caucus
Democratic Party of Hawai'i
<https://linktr.ee/stonewalldph>



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB613 HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
March 17, 2025

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura and Vice Chair Aquino and Members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** HB613 HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH. Pursuant to the Platform of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party believes housing is a human right. We believe that houselessness is the symptom of an inequitable economic system that creates generational poverty and hardship and believe this system must be changed.

HB 613 seeks to appropriate funding to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth across the State of Hawai'i.

Hawai'i is facing a crisis in homelessness, with our youngest community members bearing hardship. In Hawai'i, one in ten young adults (ages 18-25) and one in thirty adolescents (ages 13-17) experiencing some form of homelessness without the support of a parent or guardian. These young individuals are among the most vulnerable members of our community, facing heightened risks of mental health struggles, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, physical violence, and disruptions in their education.

The data underscores the urgency of this issue:

- 69% of homeless youth report mental health challenges.
- 50% have been in the juvenile justice system, jail, or detention.

- LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness face disproportionately high rates of violence and victimization, with 62% reporting physical harm.

Despite these alarming statistics, existing outreach and shelter resources remain limited, leaving many unaccompanied youth without access to critical services. This bill directly addresses this gap by ensuring funding for emergency shelters and essential services across our islands.

By passing this bill, the Legislature will take a crucial step in breaking the cycle of youth homelessness and protecting Hawai'i's future generations. Providing stable shelter, food security, mental health support, and pathways to education and employment will empower these youth to build self-sufficient and productive lives.

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i urges the Committee to pass this measure to ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth receive the care and support they desperately need.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB613 HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.



Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus Commission

Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community



Mailing Address: LGBTQ+ Commission, c/o The Department of Human Services,
P.O. Box 339, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96809-0339

Email: hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com
Web: <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/>

March 13, 2025

Senate's Committee on Health and Human Services
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Monday, March 17, 2025

RE: Strong Support for House Bill 613 HD 1

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1225 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus. (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai'i State Legislature with the following purpose:

"...to improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short- and long-range needs of its members; and ensure that there is an effective means of researching, planning, and advocating for the equity of this population in all aspects of state government."

Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

A significant gap exists in our safety network and service delivery system for unaccompanied homeless youth in Hawai'i. While some programs serve at-risk youth already enrolled in state services—such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, the Office of Youth Services for Juvenile Offenders, and Child Welfare Services—there are virtually no overnight emergency shelters for "non-system" unaccompanied youth.

Children under 18 who are kicked out, fleeing violence or abuse, or leaving homes unable to support them often end up on beaches, in parks, or on the streets. A lucky few may find temporary refuge by "couch surfing" with friends, but all remain vulnerable to assault, exploitation, trafficking, and theft. Their medical, mental health, educational, and social needs go unmet, putting them at high risk of falling into crime or long-term homelessness. Lacking life skills, job experience, and resources, many of these youth struggle to transition into stable adulthood. Currently, there are only four transitional beds statewide for unaccompanied minors. Early intervention can help break the cycle of homelessness and help address the long-term problems of our growing homeless population.

Older teenagers (18-19 years old) may be eligible for emergency shelters such as IHS, but these facilities are not designed to meet their needs, leaving them vulnerable to victimization by older, more experienced individuals on the streets. The Residential Youth Services and Empowerment (RYSE) program, operating on O'ahu's Windward side, is the only emergency shelter in the state serving youth ages 18-24, and it is frequently at capacity. No overnight emergency shelters exist for youth under 18.

Proudly established pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 369, as enacted through Act 41, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022

HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Strong Support of HB 613 HD 1

Widespread Community Support

Service providers—including RYSE, Hale Kipa, Maui Youth and Family Services, Hilo Salvation Army Family Intervention, Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, and Spill the Tea in Honolulu—offer daytime support and outreach but do not operate 24/7 shelters for youth under the age of 18. Both the Hawai'i Youth Services Network and Partners in Care have identified the urgent need for emergency shelters as a key component of the *Coordinated Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness* since 2020.

Recent data underscores this crisis:

- The 2023 *Bridging the Gap Point-in-Time Count* (covering Maui, Kaua'i, and the Big Island) identified 55 homeless youth (ages 18-24) but lacked a method to count those under 18.
- The 2024 *O'ahu Continuum of Care Point-in-Time Count* found 122 unsheltered and unaccompanied youth (ages 18-19) and 12 unsheltered and unaccompanied minors under 17.

Service providers agree that these numbers likely under-represent the true scale of youth homelessness, as minors are often less visible during counts and many teens either do not meet emergency shelter criteria or fear seeking admission to adult shelters.

HB 613: Making Safe Spaces for Youth Permanent

HB 613 takes a critical step forward by making the *Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program* permanent within the Office of Youth Services. This ensures a long-term commitment to providing emergency shelter, outreach, and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth. Additionally, the bill appropriates necessary funds to sustain and expand these essential services.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission strongly urges your support for HB 613. By securing permanent funding and institutionalizing the Safe Spaces for Youth Program, we can provide the shelter and support needed to protect vulnerable youth and help them transition to stable futures.

Should you or any member of your staff have any questions regarding this testimony you can reach the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission at hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Rick Velasquez, LCSW (he/him)
Commissioner
[Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#)

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 11:46:14 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Richard S Velasquez	Testifying for LGBTQ + Commission	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

wish to express Strong Support for this Bill please see letter from our Commission

there is no reason for our children to be on streets or beaches, in harms way. We can do better than that , we are better people than that and care about our kids



HB613 HD1 Homeless Youth
COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Monday, Mar 17, 2025: 1:00: Room 225 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB613 HD1:

ALOHA CHAIR, VICE CHAIR, AND DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE MEMBERS. My name is Alan Johnson. I am the current chair of the Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition (HSAC), a statewide organization for substance use disorder and co-occurring mental health disorder treatment and prevention agencies and recovery-oriented services.

HSAC understands that youth homelessness in Hawaii will most likely rise due to the lack of affordable housing, financial hardships, and the aftermath of the 2023 Maui wildfires. The pandemic worsened youth homelessness due to economic instability, school closures, and family stress. Especially noteworthy is that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are experiencing particularly high rates of unsheltered homelessness as people lost jobs, education support, or housing stability.

HSAC notes that the federal government has allocated funding, including \$188 million for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, which supports rapid rehousing and other services, of which the Hawaii's Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions wants to secure funding and develop strategies to combat the crisis.

1. **Rising Youth Homelessness** – Many young people face homelessness due to family conflict, abuse, financial hardship, or aging out of foster care. Without stable housing, they are at high risk of exploitation, crime, and mental health issues.
2. **Lack of Safe Alternatives** – Shelters for adults often do not accommodate youth-specific needs. Young people need spaces that provide safety, guidance, and appropriate age support.
3. **Education & Employment Barriers** – Homeless youth struggle to attend school or maintain jobs without stable housing. A shelter can provide stability, allowing them to pursue education and work opportunities.
4. **Mental & Physical Health Risks** – Many homeless youth suffer from untreated trauma, mental illness, or substance abuse. A shelter can offer access to healthcare, counseling, and rehabilitation services.
5. **Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness** – Providing safe housing and support can help youth transition into independent living and prevent chronic homelessness in adulthood.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for further questions.

Les Estrella

80 Pauahi St., STE 207

Hilo, HI 96720

March 12, 2025

Senator Joy A. Buenaventura

Hawaii State Capitol

415 S. Beretania St.

Honolulu, HI 96813

Subject: Testimony in Strong Support of HB613 HD1 – Safe Spaces for Youth Program

Dear Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services,

I, Les Estrella, am writing on behalf of Going Home Hawai`i in strong support of HB613 HD1, which seeks to make permanent the Safe Spaces for Youth Program maintained by the Office of Youth Services. This program is essential for providing shelter and support to at-risk youth experiencing homelessness, many of whom have had direct involvement with the juvenile justice system. By ensuring housing stability and increasing school enrollment, this initiative helps break the cycle that often leads these youth deeper into the justice system.

Hawai'i's runaway and homeless youth are highly vulnerable to justice system involvement, with 50% having been incarcerated, detained, or otherwise engaged in the juvenile justice system. Many of these young people are criminalized for behaviors directly tied to their homelessness, such as trespassing or survival-based offenses. Without stable housing and access to supportive services, they remain at increased risk of further legal entanglements, making it even harder for them to transition to stable and productive lives.

Additionally, 33% of homeless youth have spent time in the foster care system, often aging out without adequate support, which can result in justice system involvement as they struggle to meet their basic needs. Youth experiencing homelessness are also at heightened risk of victimization, with 62% of LGBTQ+ homeless youth and 47% of their non-

LGBTQ+ peers reporting physical harm. These alarming statistics highlight the urgent need for targeted intervention, safe housing options, and pathways to stability—all of which the Safe Spaces for Youth Program provides.

Despite the best efforts of service providers, Hawai'i County lacks dedicated shelter space for unaccompanied youth, leaving many with nowhere to turn. By passing HB613 HD1, the state can take a critical step toward diverting at-risk youth from the justice system and ensuring they receive the support necessary to lead healthier, more stable lives.

I respectfully urge the committee to pass HB613 HD1 and reinforce Hawai'i's commitment to protecting and uplifting its most vulnerable youth.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Mahalo,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Les Estrella".

Les Estrella, President and CEO



HAWAI'I HEALTH &
HARM REDUCTION CENTER

677 Ala Moana Blvd, Ste 226
Honolulu, HI 96813

(808) 521-2437

www.hhhrc.org

*"Reducing harm,
promoting health,
creating wellness, and
fighting stigma
in Hawai'i and
the Pacific."*

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613, HD 1

TO: Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, & HHS Committee

FROM: Nikos Leverenz, Policy & Advancement Manager

DATE: March 17, 2025 (1:00 PM)

Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC) strongly supports HB 613, HD 1, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

HHHRC provides homelessness services in Regions 1 and 6 on O'ahu and is a member of Partners in Care (PIC), a planning, coordinating, and advocacy alliance that develops recommendations for programs and services to fill needs within O'ahu's continuum of care for homeless persons.

HHHRC provides services to unaccompanied homeless youth, including those who are sexual and gender minorities (SGM). These youth face a range of challenges to their health and well-being compared with their heterosexual peers, including substantially increased risk of hunger, violence, behavioral health challenges, and housing instability.

Risks even more pronounced for those who are transgender. A 2018 report from the state Department of Health noted that only 51% of transgender youth typically sleep at the home of their parent or guardian's home, compared with 94% of cisgender youth.

HHHRC's mission is to reduce harm, promote health, create wellness, and fight stigma in Hawai'i and the Pacific. We work with many individuals impacted by poverty, housing instability, and other social determinants of health. Many have behavioral health problems, including those related to substance use and mental health conditions, and have also been deeply impacted by trauma related to histories of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 2:37:38 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Gerdine Markus	Testifying for Pacific Academy of Music	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a long time educator (piano instruction) I strongly recommend passing this bill to help the youth on our Island (Island of Hawai'i) survive these crazy times.

Thank yuou,

Gerdine Markus, Founder and Director Pacific Academy of Music (since 1990)

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 2:53:45 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Testifying for Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Dear Honorable Members of The Legislature,

I am writing to wholeheartedly endorse House Bill No. 613, which seeks to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent fixture within the Office of Youth Services (OYS) and secure funding to address Hawaii’s alarming youth homelessness crisis. This legislation is a critical lifeline for our state’s most vulnerable young people—unaccompanied youth ages 13 to 25—and I urge your support to transform this proven pilot into a lasting solution.

The scale of this crisis is staggering. In Hawaii, 1 in 10 young adults (ages 18–25) and 1 in 30 adolescents (ages 13–17) experience unaccompanied homelessness annually—an estimated 15,667 youth, based on Hawaii’s population of ~130,000 young adults and ~80,000 teens (U.S. Census 2020, adjusted for 2025). Nationally, 4.2 million youth face this plight yearly (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2023), and Hawaii’s share aligns with its 0.4% of the U.S. population. Yet, our state’s 2024 Point-in-Time (PIT) Count of 6,389 total homeless individuals, including 4,494 on Oahu, suggests a snapshot of ~447 unaccompanied youth (7% national youth PIT average, HUD 2023)—a stark undercount of the annual toll.

These youth are not just numbers—they’re at a breaking point. Data reveals:

- **Mental Health Crisis:** 69% report mental health problems (~10,810 of 15,667), far exceeding the 62% disabling condition rate in Hawaii’s 2023 PIT Count (Hawaii Health Data Warehouse).
- **Systemic Failures:** 33% were in foster care (5,170), outpacing the national 20% post-ageing-out homelessness rate (National Foster Youth Institute, 2023), and 50% have juvenile justice ties (7,834), above the U.S. 44% average (Chapin Hall, 2017).
- **LGBTQ+ Vulnerability:** 62% of LGBTQ+ youth (1,943 of an estimated 3,133, assuming 20% of total, True Colors United 2023) report physical harm while homeless, compared to 47% of non-LGBTQ+ youth (5,891 of 12,534).
- **Broader Risks:** Nearly all face food/shelter insecurity (62% unsheltered in 2024 PIT), 28% report substance abuse (2023 PIT), 13% engage in “survival sex” (University of

Hawaii, 2018), and 10% of unsheltered deaths tie to suicide (Hawaii Medical Examiners, 2023). Education falters too—homeless students are 87% less likely to graduate (National Center for Homeless Education, 2023).

Hawaii's high cost of living—186.2 index (Missouri Economic Research, 2024)—exacerbates this, pushing youth into streets where exploitation, STDs/HIV, and violence await. Yet, Act 130's Safe Spaces Pilot offers hope. Launched in 2022, it delivered improved housing stability, school enrollment, and reduced risky behaviors (National Network for Youth), mirroring successes like Seattle's YouthCare, which cut youth homelessness 30% in five years (HUD, 2022). OYS is poised to open a Big Island shelter if H.B. No. 613 passes—a vital first step.

Making this program permanent is a no-brainer. It tackles root causes with overnight lodging, meals, health access, and education/employment support—directly aiding the 10,810 with mental health struggles, 5,170 ex-foster youth, and 7,834 justice-involved. The 90-day no-consent shelter rule could save lives among runaways, while county-wide expansion addresses Oahu's 70% homelessness share (4,494 PIT). Economically, it's a win—each chronically homeless person costs \$35,000 yearly (National Alliance to End Homelessness); prevention via education could save millions and cut Hawaii's 15% youth unemployment (BLS, 2023).

But action must be bold. The bill's blank funding line risks inadequacy—\$10 million annually, benchmarked against California's \$8M for 2,000 youth (2023), is needed to serve thousands of the 15,667 affected. The July 1, 3000, effective date (likely a typo for 2025) must be fixed to avoid a gap post-Act 130's June 30, 2025, repeal. Targeting LGBTQ+ youth (3,133) and foster alumni (5,170) could leverage federal funds like HUD's \$75M youth program (2023), amplifying impact.

H.B. No. 613 is a chance to turn 15,667 statistics into success stories—to house the unsheltered, heal the traumatized, and educate the disrupted. I implore you to support this bill, fund it robustly, and correct its timeline. Our youth deserve safe spaces—not just for a pilot, but for good. I'm happy to provide more data or discuss further.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby Pikachu Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

KAWAIILOA

March 17, 2025

House Committee on Health and Human Services
Hearing Time: 1:00 PM
Location: State Capitol Conference Room 225
Re: HB613, HD1 Relating to Homeless Youth

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

On behalf of the Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i hui, we are writing in **support of HB613 HD1 Relating to Homeless Youth**. This bill makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services and appropriates funds for its function.

Prioritizing resources for homeless youth is essential to address the cycles of poverty and recidivism that they face. Youth homelessness is not merely a lack of shelter and often stems from unfulfilled needs, such as access to comprehensive mental health services, common support systems, or education. These resources are particularly critical for youth with mental health issues or LGBTQ+ youth, who often experience higher rates of physical harm while homeless. Increased funding for shelter, along with targeted services, can help vulnerable homeless youth avoid high-risk situations and potential encounters with the justice system. Coupling these efforts by the state with established non-profits that have the knowledge and experience working with homeless youth will further allow the Safe Spaces program runs effectively. By permanently establishing the Safe Spaces for Youth Program, the state is investing in systems of stability and long-term support for homeless youth that is desperately needed.

Opportunity for 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 HB613, HD1.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 7:31:34 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB613. Please pass this bill.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/11/2025 10:55:35 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and HHS Committee Members,

As a public health profession in Hawai'i, I write in strong support of HB613 HD1, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

The needs of unaccompanied houseless youth in our state is great, but the resources are few, especially keeping mind:

- Hawai'i has the third highest rate of homeless keiki in the U.S.
- There are no services for homeless keiki on our neighbor islands.
- There are no state general funds dedicated to homeless keiki.
- The Homeless Programs office offers no monies for this young population.

Shelter and related supports can make the difference between robust health and irreparable harm for our local keiki and their 'ohana. Please support this bill.

Mahalo,

Thaddeus Pham (he/him)

Makiki, HI



March 17, 2025

Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Committee Members,

I write in strong support of HB613 HD1 relating to homeless youth and the appropriation of funds to provide emergency shelter and services for unaccompanied homeless youth and make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

Homelessness among our youth is not just a statistic—it's a deeply personal and multifaceted crisis that touches the lives of real people in our community. Many of these young individuals find themselves without a safe place to call home due to circumstances beyond their control, such as family conflict, economic hardship, abuse, or neglect.

As director of the Lei Pua 'Ala Queer Histories of Hawai'i project, I have seen the ways in which the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ Māhū youth in particular, including hunger, violence, behavioral health, and housing instability, are far more severe than those faced by their heterosexual peers. The trauma they endure often leaves lasting scars, impacting their mental health and sense of self-worth. Without the stability of a home and the compassion of a caring community, these challenges can feel insurmountable, leading to isolation and vulnerability.

However, there is hope. Early and consistent support can transform lives. By offering understanding, resources, and a safe space, we can help these young people find their footing and build a brighter future.

Any effort to uplift community-based organizations working to end youth homelessness in Hawaii is not just appreciated—it is truly needed. Your support can make a real difference, offering a lifeline to those who need it most.

Thank you for considering this support for this important cause. Together, we can create a world where every young person feels valued, supported, and safe.

Joe Wilson

Ahupua'a Kaunala
North Shore O'ahu
House D47 | Senate D23

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/13/2025 10:52:23 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Olderr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 8:45:06 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jessie L Gonsalves	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support this bill it is needed for hawaii. Please support this bill.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/14/2025 9:09:28 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tasman Kekai Mattox	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this bill.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/15/2025 11:42:15 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Calvin Black	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing in support of HB 613. Youth who are homeless or at risk of being homeless need safe places to stay, and the need will only increase as the federal government continues to push out policies that are more and more divisive, including policies that reduce or cut funding for other programs that support those in need. Making this program permanent now is in the best interest of our youth and our community.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2025 7:40:41 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Raphael Moller	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

It is our civic duty to protect the most vulnerable. The current administration is attacking, precisely, the most vulnerable people and populations, while favoriing all billionaires.This is a humanitarian and constitutional crisis. We need to protect our youth, having permanent safe spaces for them!

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2025 9:53:54 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DeWaine Tollefsrud	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I passionately entreaty you to do the following: please fund \$3 million in family planning to ensure low-income and underinsured patients can continue accessing reproductive healthcare. Please do NOT fund \$30 million for planning the proposed new jail to replace OCCC, \$10 million for a 10-year Department of Corrections Statewide Master Plan. We should be funding healthcare, public education, free meals, and affordable housing, not a new prison

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON Health and Human Services

March 16, 2025

Dear House Members of the Health and Human Services:

My name is Sarah Joy, and I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. My opinion does not represent the university, but rather the voice of a concerned social worker who seeks more opportunities for our youth in Hawai'i.

I **strongly support** HB613, which seeks to make Safe Spaces for Youth in Hawai'i permanent. This bill is critical in ensuring that vulnerable youth have access to shelter, support services, and resources that will keep them off the streets and away from harm. More importantly, I urge the Legislature to make the Safe Spaces program a permanent resource for our youth, as this is not a temporary issue—this is an ongoing need.

Through my practicum experience, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that many young people face when they do not have a safe and stable environment. There are simply not enough places for youth to turn to when they need help. Without accessible safe spaces, too many of our youth are left with nowhere to go, increasing their risk of homelessness, human trafficking, exploitation, and becoming another heartbreaking statistic in Hawai'i.

When we invest in our youth by ensuring they have a secure place to turn to in times of crisis, we are actively preventing the cycle of homelessness, trafficking, and other forms of exploitation. The more we keep youth off the streets, the less likely they are to fall victim to these dangers.

HB613 is a necessary step toward protecting and empowering Hawai'i's youth. However, this cannot be a temporary solution—our youth need a long-term commitment. I urge the committee to pass this bill and ensure that the Safe Spaces program remains a permanent fixture in our community. Our young people deserve stability, support, and a place where they can feel safe. Let's show them that they matter and that their future is worth investing in.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Sarah Joy Valdez

LATE

33rd Legislature, State of Hawaii

House on Health and Human Services

March 17, 2025

Testimony on:

H.B. 613 H.D. 1 – Relating to the Preschool Open Doors Program

Dear Chair San Buenaventura and Vice Chair Aquino,

My name is Olivia Davies, and I am a current post graduate student living here in Hawai'i. I am testifying in favor of H.B. 613, H.D. 1 which makes the safe spaces for youth pilot program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

I have had a chance to work this population over the past two summers and I have seen first-hand how much homelessness can impact youth. The biggest impact that I have seen is having these children and young adults grow up way faster than they should. For survival purposes, homeless youth must take care of their siblings if they have them, are often exposed to greater traumas such as rape or abuse and lack treatment resources for mental health. The part that can be missed sometimes is that these impacts can continue to cause issues for the youth throughout their lives if not resolved properly. When I was 18, I was homeless, couch surfing between my friends' homes to stay afloat. That time during my life did not prepare me well to be successful as an adult now. With the proper resources and programs in place, I think that experience could have been different for me. This is why I believe that H.B. 692 H.D. 1 is beneficial for the homeless youth across Hawai'i.

I thank you for taking the time to read and hear my testimony. The work you do is greatly appreciated.

Olivia Davies

oliviahd@hawaii.edu

LATE

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2025 6:27:21 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrea Simpliciano	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Hello,

There are many reasons that youth are homeless. One could be because their parents or their caretakers have passed. Another could be because their parents have kicked them out because they are LGBTQ+, which is unfortunate because some parents need to love their children unconditionally. A third could be because their caretakers or co-habitants are abusive, and youth need to leave for their own safety. A fourth could be because they are struggling with physical and/or mental health and have turned to unhealthy coping methods such as drugs. A fifth could be the high cost of living and yet low wages due to colonization and illegal annexation of Hawai'i along with capitalism with the tourist industry that fetishizes and glorifies certain parts of Hawaiian culture. Those who desecrate homeless camps are insensitive to this history and systems of oppression against Native Hawaiians. We need to support homeless youth because they may bring new ideas to the table if they get the support and care that they need because of their origins and experiences. We need better support of homeless in general because most are Native Hawaiian and a community-led solution to housing as most Native Hawaiians are leaving the lands that belong to them rightfully for many decades because of their genealogy.



LATE

HB 613, HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

MARCH 17, 2025 · HHS HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: Imua Alliance supports HB 613, HD1, relating to homeless youth, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

Imua Alliance is a victim service provider for survivors of sex trafficking. Over the past 15 years, we have provided comprehensive direct intervention (victim rescue) services to over 200 victims, successfully emancipating them from slavery and assisting in their restoration, while providing a range of targeted services to over 1,000 victims and individuals at risk of sexual exploitation. During the pandemic, demand for victim services to our organization has skyrocketed by 330 percent, driven in part by a fivefold increase in direct crisis calls from potential trafficking victims.

Each of the victims we have assisted has suffered from complex and overlapping trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, dissociation, parasuicidal behavior, and substance abuse. Trafficking-related trauma can lead to a complete loss of identity. A victim we cared for in 2016, for example, had become so heavily trauma bonded to her pimp that while under his grasp, she couldn't remember her own name. Yet, sadly, many of the victims with whom we work are misidentified as so-called "voluntary prostitutes" and are subsequently arrested and incarcerated, with no financial resources from which to pay for their release.

Sex trafficking is a profoundly violent crime. At least 23 percent of trafficking victims in Hawai'i report being first exploited before turning 18, according to a recent report, with the average age of trafficked keiki's initial exposure to exploitation being 11. Based on regular outreach and monitoring, we estimate that approximately 150 high-risk sex trafficking establishments operate in Hawai'i. In a recent report conducted by the State Commission on the Status of Women, researchers from Arizona State University found that 1 in every 11 adult males living in our state buys sex online. When visitors are also counted, that number worsens to 1 in every 7 men walking the streets of our island home and a daily online sex buyer market of 18,614 for O'ahu and a total sex buyer population for the island of 74,362, including both tourists and residents.

ASU's findings are grim, but not surprising to local organizations that provide services to survivors of sex trafficking. Imua Alliance, for example, has trained volunteers to perform outreach to victims in high-risk locations, like strip clubs, massage parlors, and hostess bars. More than 80 percent of runaway youth report being approached for sexual exploitation while on the run, over 30 percent of whom are targeted within the first 48 hours of leaving home. With regard to mental health, sex trafficking victims are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD as a soldier in a war zone.

Greater than 80 percent of victims report being repeatedly raped and 95 percent report being physically assaulted, numbers that are underreported, according to the United States Department of State and numerous trauma specialists, because of the inability of many victims to recognize sexual violence. As one underage survivor told Imua Alliance prior to being rescued, "I can't be raped. Only good girls can be raped. I'm a bad girl. If I *want* to be raped, I have to *earn* it."

Furthermore, over 30 percent of juvenile arrests in Hawai'i are for running away from home, the highest proportion in the nation. Nationally, one in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away. Approximately 75 percent of runaways are female, while 46 percent of runaway and homeless youth report being physically abused, 38 percent report being emotionally abused, and 17 percent report being forced into unwanted sexual activity by a family or household member, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Roughly 30 percent of runaway children will be approached for sexual exploitation within 48 hours of being on the run, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited

Children, with over 80 percent being approached for the commercial sex trade during the course of their time on streets. A federal study found that an estimated 38,600 runaway youth have been sexually assaulted, in the company of someone known to be sexually abusive, or engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, food, or shelter.

Runaways are perceived as easy targets for sex traffickers because they lack stable shelter, a supportive environment, and financial resources, placing them at greater risk of forced prostitution and sexual servitude. Traffickers exploit our limited number of available shelter beds to lure young people into exploitation. As the homeless childcare provider Covenant House observes, traffickers tell homeless youth that shelters are full and ask, “Where are you going to go? Why don’t you come with me? I’ll take care of you.” Coupled with threats of and actual physical and sexual violence against the victims or their families, these coercive techniques compel runaway youth to remain enslaved.

LGBTQ+ youth, who comprise an estimated 40 percent of the runaway and homeless youth population in the United States, are exponentially more likely to fall prey to human traffickers because of discrimination, family and community trauma, and a longing for comfort and acceptance (an estimated 26 percent of LGBTQ adolescents are rejected by their families and put out of their homes simply for being open and honest about who they are). In providing care for victims of human trafficking, we have heard their stories hundreds of times.

Accordingly, **we support measures to advance our state’s fight against sexual servitude, including this bill’s extension of the Safe Places for Youth Pilot Program.** When we establish safe spaces for vulnerable young individuals to receive the care they need, we take steps to prevent the conditions from which exploitation arises.

Contact us at imuaalliance.org/contact

LATE

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 1:37:32 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shannon Rudolph	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

LATE

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/16/2025 8:25:09 PM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanda Brack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of Senate Bill 1225, Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth.

As a healthcare primary care provider (Nurse Practitioner) I recognize the long term medical and psychiatric consequences of homelessness. This proposal will help our youth to have the best chance at surviving to adulthood and becoming productive, healthy members of our community. Every kid deserves a chance to thrive.

Further, research shows that every dollar spent in prevention of homelessness yields more than one dollar in savings in EMS, hospital, psychiatric and law enforcement dollars.

Again, please accept my testimony in support of this bill.

Respectfully,

Shanda Brack, APRN

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 8:27:09 AM

Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

LATE

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Phillip Humphrey	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support HB 613. It is essential to support the youth of Hawaii and invest in our future. I strongly urge all of you to support HB 613.



Inspiring Hope, Changing Lives

Visit us on the web: www.hopeserviceshawaii.org

Connect via email: info@hopeserviceshawaii.org

HOPE Help Line: 808-935-3050

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613: RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

TO: Committee Chair, Vice-Chair and Members
FROM: Brandee Menino, CEO, Hope Services Hawai'i, Inc.
Hearing: HHS on 03-17-25

LATE

Aloha,

My name is Brandee Menino, and I am the CEO of Hope Services Hawai'i, a nonprofit organization working to make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring on Hawai'i Island. I am writing in **strong support of HB 613 HD1**, which would make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent initiative within the Office of Youth Services. In our work, we see firsthand the challenges that houseless youth face—challenges that put them at greater risk of exploitation, trauma, and long-term instability. Without dedicated resources, too many young people are left to navigate homelessness alone, leading to cycles of hardship that follow them into adulthood.

Investing in our youth now is not just the right thing to do—it is our kuleana. **As federal funding for homeless services faces uncertainty, we must step up as a state to ensure that no keiki or young adult is left without a safe place to turn.** When we provide stable shelter, mentorship, and wraparound services today, we create a pathway for youth to become healthy, self-sufficient adults, breaking the cycle of homelessness before it continues into the next generation.

The Safe Spaces for Youth program has already proven its impact by offering a much-needed safety net for vulnerable youth. Making it permanent will allow the Office of Youth Services to strengthen partnerships, expand shelter capacity, and provide the long-term support that our youth desperately need. I urge you to pass this measure and affirm Hawai'i's commitment to protecting and uplifting our young people.

Mahalo for your leadership and for prioritizing our most vulnerable youth.

Me ka ha'aha'a,

Brandee Menino
Chief Executive Officer

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Chief Executive Officer
Brandee Menino

LATE

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/17/2025 10:42:26 AM
Testimony for HHS on 3/17/2025 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
John Bickel	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a teacher, I know there is a big need for this.