

HAWAII EARLY INTERVENTION COORDINATING COUNCIL (HEICC)



Date: January 28th, 2025

To: Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
AND Committee Members

From: Hawaii Early Intervention Coordination Council (HEICC)

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 Early Child Intervention**

The Early Intervention Section (EIS) is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about how to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawaii. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawaii meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

The Hawaii Early Intervention Coordination Council (HEICC) **strongly supports** pay parity among the State's Early Intervention workforce **through HB880**. A few years ago, Early Intervention Section contracted with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to conduct a Comparative Rate and Salary Study with comparable states. **Out of the eight comparable states, Hawaii ranked last or in the bottom three** in direct service reimbursement rates for required positions such as Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Care Coordinators, Special Education Teachers and General Education teachers. In 2024, gratefully, the Legislature approved increased reimbursement rates for our contracted programs. This year, we are requesting salary rate increases for our State programs to address pay parity and the 30%-42% vacancy rates to ensure our youngest keiki with significant support needs get the services they deserve.

The department of human resources development shall reclassify the following positions within the early childhood services unit of the department of health early intervention section as follows:

- (1) Physical therapist III to physical therapist IV;
- (2) Special education teacher III to special education teacher IV; and
- (3) Occupational therapist III to occupational therapist IV.

Additionally, the department will establish mental health specialist positions to integrate early childhood mental health into its programs. In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and `ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to staff retention.

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is critical for delivering quality services and ensuring our youngest keiki with disabilities receive the support needed to help them reach their developmental

HAWAII EARLY INTERVENTION COORDINATING COUNCIL (HEICC)



goals. Having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering mandated EI services both statewide and within state operated EI programs. If the State cannot provide the mandated services, it risks the following lawsuits. HEICC would like to avoid an IDEA lawsuit like the 2018 DOE's Special Education lawsuit, which cost the State 10.5M in preventative dollars.

Historically, EIS has not received any state complaints. However, the first complaint was received in FFY2023, followed by four complaints in FFY2024. All complaints, except for one, was primarily due to the child not receiving EI services in accordance with the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that resulted in a finding of noncompliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Mahalo, on behalf of the Hawaii`i Early Intervention Coordinating council (HEICC) for your continued support to improve the health, safety and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their `ohana. We appreciate you supporting **HB880**.

Aloha nui,

Kerrie Urosevich

Kerrie Urosevich, PhD

Chair, Hawaii`i Early Intervention Coordinating Council



JOSH GREEN, M. D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA

SYLVIA LUKE
LT. GOVERNOR
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA

BRENNA H. HASHIMOTO
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

BRIAN K. FURUTO
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT
KA 'OIHANA HO'OMŌHALA LIMAHANA
235 S. BERETANIA STREET
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2437

Statement of
BRENNA H. HASHIMOTO
Director, Department of Human Resources Development

Before the
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS
Thursday, January 30, 2025
9:35 AM
State Capitol, Conference Room 329

In consideration of
HB 880 Relating to Early Child Intervention

Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and the members of the committee.

The Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) offers the following comments for HB 880.

The purpose of HB 880 is to:

1. Require HRD to reclassify certain positions within the early childhood services unit of the Department of Health Early Intervention Section; and
2. Appropriate funds for the reclassification of certain positions and the establishment of mental health specialist positions within the Early Child Services Unit of the Department of Health Early Intervention Section.

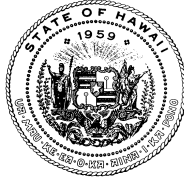
HRD recognizes the importance of filling statewide early intervention positions to support the State's ability to meet infant and early childhood mental needs. While HRD supports the intent of this bill, we respectfully oppose Section 2 which directs HRD to reclassify the following positions within the early childhood services unit of the Department of Health Early Intervention section:

- (1) Physical Therapist III to Physical Therapist IV;
- (2) Special Education Teacher III to Special Education Teacher IV; and
- (3) Occupational Therapist III to Occupational Therapist IV.

The classification of civil service positions within the State Executive Branch is grounded in the merit principle, which is covered by Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS), §76-1. In order to ensure that the provisions of the merit principle are met, a position is only reclassified to a different class of work or a higher level within the job series when the duties and responsibilities have significantly changed in terms of the nature of work, complexity, scope of work, level of responsibility, etc. These changes in duties and responsibilities are identified by the program following a change in operational needs and are documented in the position description. Position classification is not the appropriate vehicle to achieve recruitment, retention, or compensation goals.

Alternatively, there are existing pay programs that can be used to assist in the recruitment and retention of employees. These include flexible hiring rates which allow the appointing authority to hire experienced employees above the minimum of the pay range, and shortage which provides a raised hiring rate via a differential to new hires and current employees.

HRD appreciates the intent to establish mental health specialist positions within the Early Childhood Services Unit and provide funds; however, we respectfully request the removal of language requiring HRD to reclassify positions.



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

**Testimony in SUPPORT of HB880
RELATING TO EARLY CHILD INTERVENTION**

REPRESENTATIVE LISA MARTEN, CHAIR
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: 01/30/2025, 9:35am, CR 329

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The proposed measure appropriates funds to the Department of Health
2 (“Department”) for salary increases for 11.0 FTE positions and to establish 2.0 FTE mental
3 health specialist positions. The Department requests that this measure be considered as a
4 vehicle to provide this needed funding so long as it does not supplant the priorities and
5 requests outlined in the Governor’s executive budget request.

6 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure offering comments and
7 proposing an amendment.

8 **Department Testimony:** The Family Health Services Division (FHSD) provides the following
9 testimony on behalf of the Department.

10 The DOH Early Intervention Section (EIS) provides services as mandated by Part C of the
11 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for children from birth to age 3 years with
12 developmental delays or who have a health condition with a risk for developmental delay.
13 Specially trained providers are necessary to provide the IDEA Part C mandated services,
14 specifically those that offer direct services such as Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, and
15 Behavioral Therapy.

1 In Section 3, the bill proposes an appropriation of \$48,000 to reclassify three employment
2 classes (Physical therapist III to physical therapist IV; Special education teacher III to special
3 education teacher IV; and Occupational therapist III to occupational therapist IV). There are a
4 total of 11 positions that, if reclassified, would require a \$4,800 per year salary increase. This
5 total (11 x \$4,800) equals \$52,800. The Department proposes an amendment to increase the
6 amount from \$48,000 to \$52,800. Reclassification of these positions will support EIS's
7 recruitment and retention efforts to build a qualified workforce to support infants and toddlers
8 with special needs and their families.

9 Establishing the 2.0 FTE general funded mental health specialist positions will allow maximum
10 reimbursements to the state through Medicaid for services to infants and toddlers with special
11 needs and their families.

12 **Offered Amendment:**

13 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of
14 Hawaii the sum of [~~\$48,000~~] \$52,800 or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal
15 year 2025-2026 and the same sum or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal
16 year 2026-2027 for the reclassification of certain positions within the early childhood
17 services unit of the department of health early intervention section pursuant to section
18 2 of this Act.

19 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 12:24:56 PM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Daina Adams	Waianae Coast Early Childhood Services	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As a Program Manager in an Early Intervention program that is subcontracted by the Department of Health to provide the necessary services to children with special needs under the age of three years old and their families, I schedule to work late for anywhere from 3 to 10 hours per week, because 40 hours a week is not enough to keep up with the amount of work that is required to provide good quality services to the families in the Wahiawa and North Shore communities. My duties are to support the operation of our Early Intervention program, so that our program can help families whose children have special needs because they are developmentally delayed or have a diagnosis that may cause a delay in their development, or may cause other problems in their growth and adjustment throughout their lives.

I work to assist children with a wide variety of developmental needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Deaf or Hard of Hearing (DHH), Blindness or Vision Loss, Cerebral Palsy (CP), Speech delays, and many, many more. Humans' brain development is more highly impacted in the first five years of life than in all of the years of the rest of their lives, and it is critically important to infants and toddlers with special needs to be well supported to meet their developmental milestones, so that they can grow into well-adapted, functional, and contributing members of society.

At the level of the community, research has shown a correlation between Early Intervention and long-term positive outcomes. At the individual level, Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, Special Education Teachers, Speech-Language Pathologists, Social Workers, Behavioral Specialists, Psychologists, Public Health Nurses, and other professionals affect babies and their families in real time. Early Interventionists are often blessed to be present for children's first words and first steps, provoking emotional reactions from parents who were afraid their child may never develop the skills that they need to be happy, healthy, and successful in life.

Right now, our program struggles with 50% vacancies that make it very, very hard for our providers to meet with each family and provide developmental assessments and therapeutic services in a timely manner. Across the state, I understand that Early Intervention struggles with 30-40% vacancies. Some programs are doing better than others in terms of staffing, but across the board, the feedback we receive from staff who leave and professionals who decline our salary offers, is that we are not offering salaries that are sufficiently competitive with market rates.

Our therapists are professional, highly qualified, passionate individuals who use every ounce of their capability to make an impact on every infant, toddler, and family that we meet, while accepting pay that is well below what they could make in other fields. This is particularly true for Occupational Therapists and Physical Therapists, who find much better compensation is available in private practice or in medical settings. The families benefitting from Early Intervention services, particularly those families requiring an Occupational Therapist or a Physical Therapist, are currently benefitting from the assistance of highly qualified professionals whose hearts are very much in the right place, and accept a lower standard of life to help the babies we work with. As a manager with a Social Work background in Early Intervention, I know that children are the future of our society, and the professionals that support positive outcomes for the children in our communities should be better compensated.

Early Intervention programs must have the ability to offer competitive salary and benefits to recruit and retain the highly qualified practitioners that are needed to fill program vacancies, offer timely, high-quality services, and comply with the laws and regulations which protect the rights and well-being of the vulnerable infants and toddlers in our communities.

Early Intervention's struggle with vacancies and need for qualified mental health service providers is negatively impacting EI program abilities to assist the babies and families in our community who need our help the most. Families receiving EI therapy services are generally so happy to work with our EI program staff because we help their babies thrive, and the families are very gracious when our program struggles to offer timely services and retain the professionals that the families enjoy working with. Please support HB880, because it is intended to help give needed services to babies with special needs and their families, and it is so necessary for the well-being of infants, toddlers, families, and our communities!

Dear Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and members of the Committee on Human Services & Homelessness,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments relating to the recruitment and retention of early intervention service providers. I would like to express my strong support for HB880 with amendment, which seeks to re-classify the positions of Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Special Education Teachers. These re-classifications are necessary to address the program vacancies in Early Intervention services in Hawaii.

Currently, the staff vacancies in this program have had a direct negative impact on the families we serve in the Early Intervention program. As a Care Coordinator/Social Worker for Parent Child Development Center in Wahiawa, I have struggled to accomplish my required duties for these families. Each week, I spend about 12-15 hours dedicated to providing evaluations to establish eligibility for early intervention services. These services normally would be conducted by Physical Therapists (PT), Occupational Therapists (OT), and Special Education Teachers. However, as our program continues to operate with chronic staff vacancies, Care Coordinators have continuously been used to cover these evaluation services for families. The amount of time I spend each week delivering services that should be provided by OT, PT, and Special Education Teachers, is further directly impacting families by delaying the services I was hired to provide. For example, due to our lack of providers, our evaluations are typically booked out 1-2 months in advance, which results in a 1-2 month delay in children receiving services. Care Coordinators are being used to fill in as evaluators to help address these vacancies, which results in me spending half of my week conducting and writing reports for these evaluations. This is time that I cannot spend on completing intakes, home visits, Care Coordination services, developing the plan of services for families, or facilitating Transition Conferences to the DOE Special Education program. Conducting these evaluations is the single most time-consuming task that I continue to experience each week, and it significantly reduces the amount of time I have left to provide my services to families.

Our office serves areas including Schofield Barracks, Wheeler, HMR, Wahiawa, and Haleiwa/North Shore. I would be remiss if I did not also take this opportunity to remind everyone about the importance of early intervention, specifically in Hawaii where our children continue to experience exposure to toxic substances such as legacy pesticides, jet fuel in our water supplies from Red Hill, PFAS, and lead. While the "safe" levels of these toxic substances may be raised or lowered to accommodate existing environmental contamination, the body keeps the score during these essential developmental years. Perhaps if we cannot remove the contamination that may lead to developmental delays in our children, we should focus on providing adequate early intervention services to help

address these concerns head on. We can only do so if we have the staff to provide these services. Currently, we do not, and services are being gapped for some families. Early intervention pay is not competitive and our office has struggled to fill positions for quite some time, resulting in high turnover/burnout in staff. Program vacancies lead to delayed early intervention services for families. Please help us protect and support our future generations by re-classifying these essential early intervention positions!

Please support HB 880 with the amendment to also include Speech language Pathologists (SLP). Speech services are by far the number one priority for most of our families to address developmental delays in communication skills.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lacey Quintero". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "L" and "Q".

Lacey Quintero, LSW



Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
AND Committee Members

Sharon Tsuda, Executive Director
Waianae Coast Early Childhood Services
P.O. Box 404
Waianae, HI 96792

January 28, 2025

Aloha Committee Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds and Committee Members,

My name is Sharon Tsuda. I currently serve as the Executive Director of Waianae Coast Early Childhood Services (WCECS). WCECS has been providing preschool services on the Waianae coast for the past 50 years and early intervention services for infants and toddlers for more than 40 years. Our early intervention programs serve the communities and neighborhoods in Waipahu, Ewa, Kunia, Wahiawa, North Shore and Waianae. I am writing **in support of bill HB880** that will help the Department of Health, Early Intervention Section (EIS) recruit and retain highly needed therapists to support infants and toddlers with developmental delay(s) and special needs in the state of Hawaii.

Prior to serving as the Executive Director of WCECS, I provided services as a Speech-Language Pathologist and Program Manager with the Department of Education and Department of Health. While working with families, I experienced firsthand the negative effects on children and families having to go without needed services due to severe staffing shortages of Physical Therapist (PT), Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP), Occupational Therapists (OT) and Special Education Teachers. Families expressed frustration and were desperate to secure rightful and critical services necessary to help their children learn to walk, talk, eat or engage with them-the very skills that PTs, SLPs, OTs and Special Education Teachers/Early Interventionists are trained to help develop. Unfortunately, the trend of staffing shortages has not improved, challenges to deliver services remain high and the concerns of families continue to grow.

WCECS appreciates the efforts of EIS to recruit and retain needed personnel and is grateful to Representative Kitagawa who sits on HEICC and Senator Hashimoto for introducing HB880. We are hopefully that HB880 will pass and enable EIS to improve their recruitment and retention efforts for PTs, OTs and Special Education Teachers. The early intervention programs of WCECS understand that without the ability to increase salary offerings, EIS and their programs will be severely disadvantaged in competing against other health and education institutions seeking to hire PTs, OTs and Special Education Teachers and staffing shortages will not improve. Staff vacancies and shortages ultimately result in the

absence of services needed for children with disabilities and continued noncompliance with the Individuals Disability Education Act (IDEA). For these reasons, I strongly urge you to support HB880.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this testimony and for the work that you do to improve the lives of the people of Hawaii.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Sharon Tsuda', written in a cursive style.

Sharon Tsuda, Executive Director

Date: January 28, 2025

To: Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
AND Committee Members

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 Early Child Intervention**

The Early Intervention Section (EIS) is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about and ability to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawaii. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawaii meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

ECAS strongly supports parity among the State's Early Intervention workforce **through HB880**. A couple of years ago, Early Intervention Section contracted with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to conduct a Comparative Rate and Salary Study with comparable states. **Out of the eight comparable states, Hawai'i ranked last or in the bottom three** in EI program administration salaries (e.g., Program Manager, Data Clerk, and Office Assistant) and direct service reimbursement rates for required positions such as Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Care Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, General Education teachers.) The Legislature gratefully approved an increase for *contracted programs* in 2024. This year, we are requesting increases for our State programs to address the 30%-42% vacancy rates.

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is critical for delivering quality services and ensuring our youngest keiki with disabilities receive the support needed to help them reach their developmental goals. Additionally, having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering mandated EI services both statewide and within state operated EI programs. If the State cannot provide the mandated services, it risks the following lawsuits. ECAS would like to avoid an IDEA lawsuit similar to DOE's Special Education law suit few years back, costing the State 10.5M in preventative dollars.

EIS' budget request would assist EIS in doing the following

- **Infant and toddler development.** As a result, we cannot successfully identify all of the infants and toddlers who could benefit from early intervention (EI) services and support. This results in having more keiki entering the Department of Education (DOE) special education programs, costing the State millions of preventable taxpayer dollars. With more children with special needs needing remediation support, it also places more of a burden on our K-12 system.
- **Federal funding for the State.** Provider vacancies impact the state's ability to be in compliance with federal mandates. When the State cannot maintain its mandates, it risks lawsuits and federal funding, which will ultimately harm our youngest children birth to three with special needs. Most recently in 2018, the State reached

a 10.25 million dollar settlement in the U.S. District Court stemming from allegations that DOE violated the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The Department of Health would like to avoid a similar lawsuit.

Historically, EIS has not received any state complaints. However, the first complaint was received in FFY2023, followed by four complaints in FFY2024. All complaints, with the exception of one complaint, was primarily due to the child not receiving EI services in accordance with the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that resulted in a finding of noncompliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The department of human resources development shall reclassify the following positions within the early childhood services unit of the department of health early intervention section as follows:

- (1) Physical therapist III to physical therapist IV;
- (2) Special education teacher III to special education teacher IV; and
- (3) Occupational therapist III to occupational therapist IV.

Additionally, the department will establish mental health specialist positions to integrate early childhood mental health into its programs. In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and `ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to staff retention.

Mahalo for your continued support to improve the health, safety and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their `ohana. We appreciate you supporting **HB880**.

Aloha nui,



Jonathan R. Alexander

Hawaii Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Coordinator (CSPD), ECAS



Date: January 28, 2025

To: Committee on Human Services & Homelessness
Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
Committee Members

From: Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health, dba AIMH HI

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 Early Child Intervention**

The Early Intervention Section (EIS) is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about and ability to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawai'i. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawai'i meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

The first 1,000 days after birth are critical in establishing brain connections, relationship patterns, and laying the foundation for future development. **AIMH HI** stands on the vision that "infant mental health is everyone's kuleana" - and the Early Intervention Section is key in addressing the mental and early relational health of our youngest. Our association's role in the early childhood space is to "hold the hands of those who hold the hands of babies" - knowing that when the providers around young children are steady, the children can then have steady growth and development. **We urge you to move this critical bill forward to support the workforce that is doing the specialized work that is not only their professions but also understanding the unique developmental needs of babies and toddlers with disabilities.**

AIMH HI strongly supports parity among the State's Early Intervention workforce through **HB880**. A couple of years ago, Early Intervention Section contracted with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to conduct a Comparative Rate and Salary Study with comparable states. **Out of the eight comparable states, Hawai'i ranked last or in the bottom three** in EI program administration salaries (e.g., Program Manager, Data Clerk, and Office Assistant) and direct service reimbursement rates for required positions such as Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Care Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, General Education teachers.) The Legislature gratefully approved an increase for contracted programs in 2024. This bill will enable our State programs to address the 30%-42% vacancy rates.

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This bill also allows the department to establish mental health specialist positions to integrate early childhood mental health into its programs. Infant Mental Health Specialists provide targeted supports, understanding the delicate need to support the relationships around the child. The addition of mental health specialists is an innovative approach to tackling mental health as early as possible and triaging resources in a more efficient way, alleviating the need to elevate children to more intensive services. In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and 'ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to staff retention.

Mahalo for your commitment and support to improve the mental health, safety, and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their 'ohana.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erin Henderson Lacerdo', is positioned above the printed name.

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E©

Executive Director, Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

LATE

To: House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness
Re: HB 880 Relating to Early Childhood Intervention

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference
Thursday, January 30, 2025, 9:35AM

Dear Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Committee Members,

On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in strong support of HB 900, relating to early childhood intervention. This bill requires the Department of Human Resources Development to reclassify certain early intervention specialist positions within the Early Childhood Services Unit in the Department of Health.

The bill proposes funding to reclassify state provider positions (Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapist, and Special Education Teachers) from a level III to a level IV salary schedule to have pay parity with state Speech Pathologists who are currently at a level IV salary schedule. The bill also proposes to establish two mental health specialist positions to support infant mental health within the Early Childhood Unit, Department of Health, Early Intervention Section. In light of severe workforce shortages, pay parity and more mental health specialist positions are desperately needed to help meet the needs of our keiki.

Hawai'i has faced a critical shortage of professionals who can meet the mental health needs of our keiki, making it harder for families to access timely, quality care. It is not uncommon for families to experience year-long waitlists and delays accessing essential mental health care, services, and support. The bill takes important steps towards addressing this workforce shortage by addressing staffing gaps that directly impact the development of infants and toddlers who rely on these critical services.

Fair compensation is essential for attracting and training highly skilled providers, including Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Special Education Teachers, and Speech Pathologists. Without pay parity, we risk losing these essential professionals to other states, private practice, or other sectors, which further deepens the long-standing workforce gap. By investing in fair compensation, we can build a sustainable workforce that ensures our keiki receive the mental health support they need to thrive during their most crucial years of growth and development.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 880.

Kind regards,
Noreen Kohl, Ph.D.
Policy Researcher and Advocate

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 10:18:11 AM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kauinohea Correa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support this bill. It is necessary for retention and recruitment of qualified providers in the early intervention space.

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 1:21:11 PM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mayumi Coloma	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Qualified providers are the backbone to federally mandated Early Intervention Services. We cannot attract and retain qualified providers of developmentally-appropriate therapeutic services without paying them competitively. As providers and services dwindle, it's the keiki and their families that bear the impact of this service deficit. In turn, this will reverberate into the community sytem, creating more resource demands down the line. Please support increased budget appropriations for our State's E.I. programs and providers, so we can fulfill the mission and mandates of IDEA Part C and best serve Hawaii's keiki. Mahalo Nui. - Mayumi Coloma, LCSW

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 1:42:54 PM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lilian Rebamonte-Smith	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the HB880 addressing salary increases for Early Intervention Service professionals in Hawai‘i, including Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Special Education Teachers. This legislation is crucial for addressing the state's high vacancy rates in these essential roles. Additionally, the bill's provision for creating mental health specialist positions within state programs is a timely and necessary step to enhance mental health support for Hawai‘i's keiki and their ‘ohana. Increasing salaries for these professionals will help attract and retain qualified staff, ensuring that children with developmental delays or disabilities receive the early support they need. Moreover, the inclusion of mental health specialists will strengthen the state's ability to provide comprehensive care, addressing both physical and mental health needs of the community. This bill represents a significant investment in Hawai‘i's healthcare and education systems, which will ultimately benefit the entire community by improving access to critical services and supporting the well-being of its residents.

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/28/2025 4:23:56 PM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Analise Polinsky	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I appreciate the opportunity to provide support on the critical issue of staffing vacancies in early intervention services in Hawai‘i. As a care coordinator at an EI program, I want to highlight the urgent need for increased staffing and qualified professionals in our early intervention system.

Early intervention services are essential in identifying and addressing developmental delays in young children, ensuring they receive the necessary support during very crucial years of development. Research consistently shows that early intervention leads to better long-term outcomes in education, social skills, and overall well-being. However, in Hawai‘i, families are struggling to access these vital services due to a severe shortage of qualified professionals.

Currently, evaluations that should be conducted by child development specialists are often being carried out by care coordinators—dedicated individuals who are already overburdened with caseloads beyond capacity. These care coordinators may also lack the specialized education and training in child development necessary to conduct thorough and accurate assessments. This not only places undue pressure on them but also results in delays and potential misidentifications of children who desperately need support.

Families are experiencing long wait times for services, critical developmental windows are being missed, and caregivers are left feeling helpless in navigating a system that should be supporting them. The absence of qualified and competent professionals in these roles directly impacts our kids and communities.

To address this crisis, we must prioritize hiring professionals, increase funding for staff positions, and reduce caseload burdens to ensure that every child receives the quality care they deserve. Without these changes, we risk failing the very families who need our support the most.



Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
Committee on Health & Homelessness

Comments for H.B. No. 880, Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) Early Child Intervention

January 28, 2025

Aloha Representatives Marten and Olds,

I am providing testimony regarding H.B 880 to support parity among the State's Early Intervention workforce.

I serve as Dean of the Graduate College of Health Sciences (GCHS) at Hawai'i Pacific University (HPU). The GCHS includes Hawai'i's first and only Doctor of Physical Therapy and Doctor of Occupational Therapy programs. Graduates of these programs will help meet the health and rehabilitation needs of the residents of Hawai'i, including providing early intervention services to infants and toddlers and their families. However, the current direct service reimbursement rates for these services limit the likelihood that newly licensed PTs and OTs will choose this practice setting over settings that pay competitive salaries.

Recruiting and retaining qualified OTs, PTs and all EIS personnel is critical for delivering quality services and ensuring our youngest keiki with disabilities and their families receive the support needed to help them reach their developmental goals. Additionally, having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering federally mandated EI services.

I fully support H.B 880 to reclassify the following positions within the early childhood services unit of the HI Department of Health, Early Intervention Section as follows:

1. Physical Therapist III to Physical Therapist IV;
2. Special education teacher III to special education teacher IV; and
3. Occupational Therapist III to Occupational Therapist IV.

Mahalo for your continued support to improve the health, safety, and well-being of our youngest keiki and their families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tricia Catalino".

Tricia Catalino, PT, DSc
Interim Dean
College of Health and Society
Hawai'i Pacific University
tcatalino@hpu.edu

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 12:23:31 AM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Leilani Kailiawa	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha, My name is Leilani Kailiawa. I am in strong support for HB880.

As a parent of three children, my youngest child, who is almost turning 9 years old, spent his first 7 months of his life at the Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children due to a medical condition called volvulus. He was automatically referred to Early Intervention Services. When he was discharged, he came home with a feeding tube in his nose, where he received most of his nutrition. Due to his medical condition and extended stay at the hospital, he has developed several disabilities: He received OT and SL:P services while in early intervention services. He transitioned into HI DOE Special Education preschool

Mahalo nui loa for your time.

With gratitude

Leilani Kailiawa, parent and community leader

HB-880

Submitted on: 1/29/2025 6:59:45 AM

Testimony for HSH on 1/30/2025 9:35:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Jennifer Endo	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

My name is Jennifer Endo and I support this bill. It is such important work being done at the Early Intervention level.

It is important to retain and attract qualified individuals, to assist in the needs of children ages 0-3.