



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
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HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 952 SD1
RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES**

Representative Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Representative Sharon Moriwaki, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

February 19, 2025, at 10:02 a.m., Room Number 211

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) in the Governor's Office **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** S.B. 952 SD1, Relating to Child Welfare Services. The bill presents an important opportunity to assist families at risk of child welfare involvement by providing them concrete supports, peer supports, connection to cultural programming, parental skill-building, and training in protective factors that help to prevent child abuse and neglect.

In the report submitted to the 2025 Hawai'i State Legislature, the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group addresses the cascading impact of poverty and the need for concrete supports to prevent child welfare service involvement. Throughout the Working Group meetings and in community conversations, youth and families with lived expertise navigating the child welfare system shared that most families who come to the attention of the current system need support services rather than protective intervention.

A core component of S.B. 952 SD1 is the inclusion of trained, trauma-informed peer support navigators with lived experience. These navigators are uniquely positioned to help families connect with community-based services and supports. Peer support programs are particularly valuable because they provide families with access to navigators who understand their struggles firsthand. For children, parents, and caregivers, turning to someone from their own community who has shared similar experiences fosters trust and bridges the gap between families and the services they need, increasing the likelihood that families will follow through on available interventions.

Peer support services have proven to be an effective, evidence-based practice. Since 2007, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has recognized peer support services as a reimbursable practice, and many states have successfully incorporated them into their Medicaid plans. While research on peer supports within the child welfare system is still emerging, early findings are promising and suggest that peer support can improve outcomes for families, reduce stress, and enhance overall family functioning.

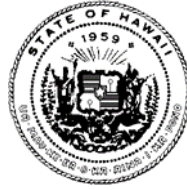
S.B. 952 SD1 also emphasizes the critical need for immediate financial assistance and essential resources such as food, clothing, housing, childcare, and transportation. These provisions are key to stabilizing families in crisis. Addressing basic needs reduces the stressors that often lead to interactions with the child welfare system, enabling parents and caregivers to focus on strengthening their relationships with their children. The program's holistic approach helps families meet both their immediate needs and long-term goals, empowering them to navigate challenges and work toward healthier, more stable futures.

S.B. 952 SD1 provides a meaningful opportunity to focus on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support for families. By investing in prevention services with a trauma-informed approach, the bill provides additional unique elements that were specifically requested from the Mālama 'Ohana recommendations report (i.e. peer support navigators, concrete financial supports, parental skill building and cultural programming).

We respectfully urge the committee to pass S.B. 952 SD1 and thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill.

Tia L.R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
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February 18, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 952 SD1 – RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.**

Hearing: February 19, 2025, 10:02 a.m.
Conference Room 211 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill and provides comments. This measure is similar to the Office of Wellness & Resilience's (OWR) administration measure SB 1399 SD1, which passed out of the Committee on Health & Human Services with amendments on February 5, 2025. SB 1399 included an appropriation of \$987,150 for each year of the biennium. DHS defers to the OWR and the Department of Health on their resource needs to implement the diversion program. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

PURPOSE: Requires the Office of Wellness and Resilience to design, implement, and administer a five-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program to support families and children involved, at risk of involvement, or at risk of re-involvement with child welfare services. Allows the Office to contract with public and private entities to provide necessary services. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. (SD1)

DHS appreciates amendments by the Committee on Health & Human Services that:

- (1) Extend the duration of the Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program from two years to five years;
- (2) Change the appropriation to an unspecified amount;
- (3) Amend section 1 to reflect its amended purpose; and
- (4) Insert an effective date of December 31, 2050, to encourage further discussion.

This measure provides an opportunity to address a protective factor¹ in the prevention of child abuse and neglect by meeting the concrete needs of children and families and reducing the risk of entering the child welfare system. There is clear evidence that unconditional asset transfers, such as the 2021 Child Tax Credits, resulted in a significant reduction in reports of child abuse and neglect. Other studies² show that emergency room visits for children went down after families received additional income support.

The proposed pilot program will complement existing diversion services offered by the DHS Child Welfare Services Branch, as well as prevention services with Family First Hawai'i under the Family First Prevention Services Act. These programs provide supportive services to families at risk of involvement with child welfare services by equipping them with the skills and resources needed to create a safe and nurturing environment for their children. This pilot program will include:

1. **Peer Support and System Navigation** – Families in crisis often struggle to access necessary services. By incorporating trained, trauma-informed peer navigators with lived experience, this program can ensure that families receive tailored guidance and support.
2. **Financial and Concrete Needs Assistance** – Addressing economic instability is a protective factor in preventing child neglect and family separation. Providing financial resources for food, clothing, housing, and transportation can help families stabilize and avoid unnecessary child welfare involvement.
3. **Trauma-Informed Intervention and Parenting Support** – Strengthening caregiver-

¹ For more on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework, see, <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>.

² See, Association of Expanded Child Tax Credit Payments With Child Abuse and Neglect Emergency Department Visits, at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9936349/#:~:text=Question,and%20neglect%2Drelated%20ED%20visits.>

child relationships and improving parenting skills through coaching on positive communication, behavior management, and emotional regulation will foster a nurturing home environment to help keep families safely together.

Investing in this pilot program aims to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families and prevent reports and incidents of child abuse and neglect. DHS will work with OWR in its development and implementation of the pilot program to ensure that the public benefits participants receive are not reduced by the pilot programs' benefits or services. DHS will also continue dialogue with OWR regarding opportunities to support peer navigators.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

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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

February 15, 2025

To: Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair
And members of the Committee on Ways and Means

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 952 SD1 RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 952 SD1 Relating to Child Welfare Services

I serve as a member of the Hawaii Trauma-Informed Care Task Force. Over the past 3 years, the task force has developed a plan and strategies that will incorporate trauma-informed approaches to services provided to children, youth, and families.

This Child Welfare Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program will utilize peer navigators, an evidence-informed practice, to help families identify needs and access services. It will provide material assistance to support basic needs. By strengthening families, it will reduce the overload of the Child Welfare System.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



SB1398 Trauma Informed Care Training

COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Wednesday, Feb 5, 2025: 1:00: Room 225 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports SB1398:

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.

Trauma-informed care (TIC) training is crucial in Hawai'i due to the state's unique cultural diversity, historical trauma, and high rates of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Here are some key reasons why TIC training is essential in Hawai'i:

1. High Rates of Trauma and ACEs

- Hawai'i has a significant prevalence of ACEs, including domestic violence, substance abuse, and family separation.
- Research shows that ACEs increase the risk of long-term health issues, including mental health disorders, substance abuse, and chronic diseases.

2. Historical and Generational Trauma

- Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders (NHPI) have experienced historical trauma due to colonization, land dispossession, and cultural suppression.
- Many communities face disparities in health, education, and socioeconomic status, increasing vulnerability to trauma-related issues.

3. Cultural Sensitivity and Indigenous Healing Practices

- Trauma-informed care in Hawai'i should integrate local cultural values, including mālama (care), kuleana (responsibility), and aloha (compassion).
- Incorporating traditional healing practices, such as ho'oponopono (conflict resolution) and lā'au lapa'au (herbal medicine), can enhance TIC effectiveness.

4. Impact on Healthcare, Education, and Social Services

- Healthcare providers need TIC training to support patients with trauma histories effectively.
- Educators can benefit from TIC to create safe learning environments and address student behavioral challenges.
- Social service agencies can use TIC to improve support for foster youth, domestic violence survivors, and justice-involved individuals.

5. Workforce Readiness and Community Resilience

- Training professionals in TIC can improve service delivery and reduce burnout among frontline workers.
- Strengthening trauma-informed systems can promote resilience and healing across communities.

Call to Action

Expanding trauma-informed care training in Hawai‘i is essential for creating compassionate, culturally responsive, and effective support systems. Investing in TIC can lead to better outcomes in health, education, and social well-being, ultimately fostering a stronger, more resilient Hawai‘i.

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

To: Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)
Re: SB 952 SD 1 Relating to child welfare services

LATE

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 211 & Via Videoconference
February 19, 2025, 10:02AM

Dear Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Committee Members,

On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in strong support of SB 952, relating to child welfare services. This bill appropriates funds for the Office of Wellness and Resilience to design, implement, and administer a two-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program to support families and children involved, at risk of involvement, or at risk of re-involvement with child welfare services; allows the office to contract with public and private entities to provide necessary services; and requires a report to the Legislature.

My name is Noreen Kohl, PhD, I am a policy researcher and advocate with Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN), and my work focuses on primary prevention of child maltreatment, which includes economic security to ensure families have what they need not just to survive but to thrive. This bill is inspired by the recommendations of the Mālama 'Ohana working group (see [Final Report and Recommendations](#)¹), and represents a significant step in the right direction towards supporting families by providing them the services and supports needed to prevent involvement or reentry into the child welfare system.

This pilot program is essential to address the gaps in support for families navigating complex child welfare challenges, ensuring they receive the resources and advocacy needed to prevent unnecessary family separation, including peer-to-peer guidance. By providing community-based assistance, the pilot will help families access supportive, stable caregiving approaches, promote child well-being, and reduce the long-term social and economic costs of foster care.

I urge you to please pass this bill to support Hawai'i's families. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in **strong support of SB 952**.

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

¹ See the Mālama 'Ohana working group Final Report and Recommendations (URL: <https://www.malamaohana.net/>) and specifically, findings and recommendations of the "Hui Ho'opūlama" or "Systems Supports" Permitted Interaction Group (URL: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64c47295bf6d88319c76bcde/t/66b2f3d6260d884d777c6aec/172300386226/2024.05.21+MOWG+Hui+Ho%CA%BBopu%CC%84lama+-+Systems+PIG+Pt+2.pdf>).

SB-952-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/15/2025 10:41:55 AM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2025 10:02:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marilyn Yamamoto	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In support.

SB-952-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/17/2025 1:16:08 PM

Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2025 10:02:00 AM

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

Comments:

I support this bill.

LATE

SB-952-SD-1

Submitted on: 2/18/2025 11:33:49 AM
Testimony for WAM on 2/19/2025 10:02:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Bethany Stetson	Testifying for Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 952, which establishes a two-year CWS diversion and intervention pilot program within the Office of Wellness and Resilience. The Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence offers our testimony in support of this bill. Recognizing the ways that the Child Welfare System and Domestic Violence is interconnected, we believe that this diversion program will connect critical services to families in need of support to prevent domestic violence or leave situations of domestic violence and also mitigate risks of survivors experiencing unnecessary involvement with CWS.

Thank you,

Bethany Stetson

Program Director, HSCADV