

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
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**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB0952 SD2
RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.**

SENATOR KYLE T. YAMASHITA, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date: March 27, 2025

Room Number: 308

1 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) supports SB952 SD2, as long as it
2 does not replace or adversely impact priorities set in the Executive Budget.

3 SB952 SD2 seeks to establish additional support for the Child Welfare System and for youth and
4 families involved in, and at-risk for, entering into Child Welfare Services (CWS). As the state's
5 Medicaid provider of mental health services for youth and families, the Child and Adolescent
6 Mental Health Division (CAMHD) recognizes that, when youth are removed from their home
7 (and exposed to the factors that led to their removal), they are at risk for both immediate
8 psychological impacts as well as long-term mental health and medical impacts. This is well
9 documented in the extensive body of research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)¹.

10 ACEs include emotional, physical, and sexual abuse; emotional and physical neglect; domestic
11 violence; parental issues of mental illness, incarceration, substance abuse, and separation or
12 divorce. These childhood experiences are linked to higher risks of suicide attempts², increased

¹ Center for Disease Control, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Published October 8th, 2024. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/aces/about/index.html>.

² Dube, S.R., Anda, R.F., Felitti, V.J., Chapman, D.P., Williamson, D.F., & Giles, W.H. (2001). Childhood Abuse, Household Dysfunction, and the Risk of Attempted Suicide Throughout the Life Span, Findings from the Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. JAMA, 286 (24), 3089-3096.

1 serious health risk and socioeconomic challenges in adulthood³. Additionally, youth exposed to
2 ACEs are at higher risk of exposing their own children to ACEs when they become parents^{1,4}.

3 More recent studies including experiences such as community violence, discrimination, problems
4 with housing, and separation from caregiver due to foster care show similar results in terms of
5 negative health outcomes and lower general functioning^{5,6}. These findings alone suggest that
6 more needs to be done to protect our population from the continued mental and physical health
7 effects resulting from abuse, subsequent involvement with CWS, and foster placement. Locally,
8 findings from the Malama Ohana Working Group also showed the need to establish more
9 preventative programs and comprehensive services to reduce the risk of families entering the
10 Child Welfare System.

11 There are also interventions that are being used in other states to mitigate the immediate and
12 long-term effects of ACEs. Interventions, such as Trauma-Focused Cognitive-Behavioral
13 Therapy and Parent-Child Care (PC-CARE) have already been used to support youth and
14 families in our state. Should SB952 pass, CAMHD can offer recommendations about evidence-
15 based, culturally sustaining, dyadic family interventions to be delivered to at-risk and CWS
16 involved families.

17 It is evident from this research, from the Malama Ohana Workgroup, and from the many
18 difficulties facing the CWS, that there is a need to provide more support to CWS and to our

³ Merrick, M.T., Ford, D.C., Ports, K.A., Guinn, A.S., Chen, J., Klevens, J., Metzler, M., Jones, C.M., Simon, T.R, Daniel, V.M., Ottley, P., & Mercy, J.A. (2019). Vital Signs: Estimated Proportion of Adult Health Problems Attributable to Adverse Childhood Experiences and Implications for Prevention – 25 States, 2015-2017. *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 68(44), 999-1005.

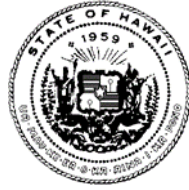
⁴ Dube, S.R., Felitti, V.J., Dong, M., Chapman, D.P, Giles, W.H., & Anda, R.F. (2003). Childhood Abuse, Neglect, and Household Dysfunction and the Risk of Illicit Drug Use: The Adverse Childhood Experiences Study. *Pediatrics*, 111 (3), 564-572.

⁵ Thakur, N., Hessler, D., Koita, K., Ye, M., Benson, M., Gilgoff, R., Bucci, M., Long, D., & Harris, N.B. (2020) Pediatric Adverse Childhood Experiences and Related Life Events Screener (PEARLS) and Health in a Safety-net Practice. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 108, 1-13.

⁶ Ye, M., Hessler, D., Ford, D., Benson, M., Koita, K., Bucci, M., Long, D., Harris, N.B., & Thakur, N. (2023) *BMC Pediatrics*, 23(367).

- 1 youth and families at risk for and already involved in the Child Welfare System, for the long-
- 2 term health and wellness of all the people in this state.
- 3 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

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
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 26, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 952 SD2 – RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.**

Hearing: March 27, 2025, 3:30 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill, defers to the Office of Wellness & Resilience (OWR). As OWR will become an attached agency of DHS in July, DHS and OWR will work together to implement this measure. Since the last hearing, DHS and OWR staff have met to discuss implementation strategies and look forward to further discussion.

PURPOSE: This bill requires the Department of Human Services, in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience to design a 5-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program to support families and children involved, at risk of involvement, or at risk of reinvolvement with child welfare services. Specifies that the Department of Human Services shall implement and administer the pilot program. Allows the Department to contract with public and private entities to provide necessary services. Requires reports to the Legislature. Appropriates funds. (SD2)

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.

The Committee on Ways and Means made substantive amendments to the measure by:

- (1) Specifying that the pilot program should be designed by the Department of Human Services in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience and implemented and administered by the Department; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive edits for purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

This measure provides an opportunity to address a protective factor ¹ 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 studies ² 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 offer supportive services to families at risk of involvement with child welfare services, equipping them with the necessary skills and resources 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

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.>

protective factor in preventing child neglect and family separation. Providing financial resources for food, clothing, housing, and transportation can help families stabilize and prevent unnecessary involvement with child welfare.

3. **Trauma-Informed Intervention and Parenting Support** – Strengthening caregiver-child relationships and enhancing parenting skills through coaching on positive communication, behavior management, and emotional regulation will foster a nurturing home environment, helping to keep families safely together.

Investing in this pilot program will bring additional resources to families with children, aiming to improve outcomes for vulnerable children and families and prevent reports and incidents of child abuse and neglect. It is also an opportunity to test and evaluate additional trauma-informed strategies.

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



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
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Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 952 SD2 RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

March 27, 2025, at 3:30 p.m., Room Number 308

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) in the Governor's Office **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** S.B. 952 SD2, 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 SD2 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 SD2 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.

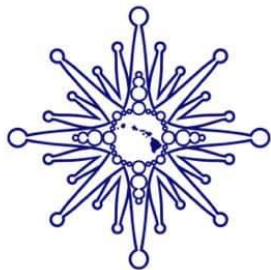
S.B. 952 SD2 provides a meaningful opportunity to focus on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support for families. By investing in prevention services with a trauma-informed approach, the bill provides additional unique elements that were specifically requested from the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group recommendations report (i.e. peer support navigators, concrete financial supports, parental skill building and cultural programming).

The OWR is scheduled to become an attached agency to the Department of Human Services (DHS) in July 2025, and we are looking forward to continued collaboration with DHS, especially around the topic of strengthening supports system for children and families in a trauma-informed way.

Lastly, we note that the appropriation amount is noted blank in the SD2 version and the OWR is humbly requesting for the appropriation amount that was noted in the original version of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill.

Tia L.R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience
Office of the Governor



HAWAII COALITION

FOR

CHILD PROTECTIVE REFORM

Hearing SB952-SD2 on March 27, 2025

Representative Yamashita and committee members,

The HCCPR strongly supports this bill with comments that support our position and one amendment.

The 2025 legislative session started with 15 bills directed toward reform of CWS after one year of study into the goals of an improved system. 6 bills that were crucial to reform were either declined a hearing or failed to pass all committees. The only remaining bills are for general funding to DHS and trauma-informed training to DHS by OWR. If SB952 is not implemented, the status quo of CWS will remain unchanged.

WAM changed the administration of the 5-year pilot project from the OWR to DHS. **DHS then testified to the HSH committee that an extension would be needed to prepare to administer the project.** The HCCPR requests that the OWR administer the project as originally designated, with DHS as a supportive partner.

DHS has consistently been plagued with staff shortages that have not been addressed yet. The organization and implementation of the 5-year program to assist families to avoid CWS involvement should be with the OWR.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

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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 24, 2025

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair
And members of the Committee on Finance

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 952 SD2 RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 952 SD2 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 project will move Hawaii toward its goal of being a trauma-informed state.

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



Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.

To: House Committee on Finance
Re: SB 952 SD2 Relating to child welfare services

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference
Thursday March 27, 2025

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, I am writing in strong support of SB 952 SD2, 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 SD2 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-2

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 9:05:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/27/2025 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Paul Normann	Neighborhood Place of Puna	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

Neighborhood Place of Puna supports SB952 and all efforts to help families access the resources and supports they need to stay out of the Child Welfare System and, most importantly, thrive as a family so that their keiki are raised in safe, stable, and nurturing homes.

Please Support SB 952

Paul Normann



SB952 SD2 Trauma Informed Care Training

COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair

Thursday, Mar 27 2025: 3:30: Room 308 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports SB952 SD2:

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 supports a 5-year CWS diversion and intervention pilot using trained trauma-informed peer support navigators, financial resources, and trauma-informed interventions.

This pilot 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.



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 952, SD2: RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

TO: House Committee on Finance
FROM: Tina Andrade, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawaii
Hearing: Thursday, 3/27/25 @ 3:30 PM; CR 308 or via videoconference

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

Catholic Charities Hawaii (CCH) strongly supports **SB 952, SD2**, which would establish a pilot program that would provide supports to families to help prevent entry or reentry into the child welfare system.

As a community-based organization serving Hawaii's most vulnerable children and families for over 77 years, CCH understands the challenges families face in meeting their children's needs, especially with the rising cost of living. Parents struggling to afford rent, food, childcare, and utilities need concrete supports to strengthen their resilience. Other pathways to support, other than the child welfare system, are needed. We must invest in direct support and community resources to help families remain stable and together.

This bill would provide more programs and concrete support to strengthen families. It would provide a holistic approach offering peer support navigators to help connect families with resources, financial and resource assistance, and parenting support. These services are key to stabilizing families as they focus on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support to these families in crisis.

These services emphasize the importance of family preservation as they assist families facing crises. By prioritizing direct support to these families, we can create better outcomes for children and families.

We urge the committee to pass SB 952 SD2 to ensure that families receive the support they need without the undue hardship of child welfare involvement.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of this measure. If you have any questions, please contact Shellie Niles at (808) 527-4813.





March 27, 2025

Members of the House Committee on Finance:

Chair Kyle T. Yamashita	Rep. Rachele F. Lamosao
Vice Chair Jenna Takenouchi	Rep. Mike Lee
Rep. Tina Nakada Grandinetti	Rep. Tyson K. Miyake
Rep. Daniel Holt	Rep. Dee Morikawa
Rep. Ikaika Hussey	Rep. Shirley Ann Templo
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Loy	Rep. David Alcos III
Rep. Lisa Kitagawa	Rep. Julie Reyes Oda
Rep. Matthias Kusch	Rep. Gene Ward

Re: SB952 SD2 Relating to Child Welfare Services

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the House Committee on Finance:

The Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (HSCADV) addresses the social, political, and economic impacts of domestic violence on individuals, families, and communities. We are a statewide partnership of domestic violence programs and shelters.

On behalf of HSCADV and our 25 member programs statewide, I respectfully submit testimony **in support of SB952 SD2**. This bill establishes a pilot program that would provide support to families to help prevent entry or reentry into the child welfare system, including financial assistance and resources to meet families' such as food, clothing, hygiene, housing, parenting, childcare, household, and transportation.

SB952 SD 2 responds to the recommendations from the [Mālama 'Ohana Working Group](#), which call for additional programs and tangible support to enhance family resilience. It adopts a holistic approach by providing peer support navigators to assist families in accessing resources, financial aid, and parenting support – all essential for stabilizing families in crisis while emphasizing prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive family support.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Sincerely,
Angelina Mercado, Executive Director

KAWAIILOA

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i

March 27, 2025

House Committee on Finance

Hearing Time: 3:30 PM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 3308

Re: SB952 SD2, Relating to Child Welfare Services

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i hui, we are writing in **strong support of SB952 SD2, relating to child welfare services**. This bill requires 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 reinvolvement with child welfare services. The bill allows the office to contract with public and private entities to provide necessary services, requires a report to the Legislature, and appropriates funds. In the latest draft, amendments specify that the diversion program should be designed by the Department of Human Services in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience and will be implemented and administered by the department.

Too often, families facing hardship are funneled into the child welfare system due to a lack of preventative resources and early intervention. The pilot program created by SB952 SD2 would help bridge that gap by providing targeted support services designated to keep families intact and reduce unnecessary child welfare interventions. By allowing the Office of Wellness and Resilience to collaborate with both public and private entities, this bill ensures that families have access to a comprehensive network of services, including mental health support, substance abuse treatment, parenting education, and economic assistance. The appropriation of funds for this initiative is an investment in the health and stability of our communities, ultimately reducing long-term costs associated with foster care placements and other child welfare interventions.

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 SB952 SD2.

1099 Alakea Street, Suite 2530 | Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 | (808) 447-1840



TO: Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, members of the House Committee on Finance
FROM: Dana Matsunami, Child Welfare Attorney at the National Center for Youth Law
RE: Testimony in **SUPPORT** of **SB 952**

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Dana Matsunami, I am a child welfare attorney at the National Center for Youth Law. I live and work here on Oahu, where I focus on legal issues relating to foster care throughout our state. On behalf of the National Center for Youth Law, I am testifying **in support** of SB952, which will establish a five-year family resilience pilot program to keep families safe, together, and with the resources they need to prevent child welfare system involvement.

As the field of psychology has advanced, so has our understanding of the long-term harm family separation causes children. The act of separating children from their parents triggers physical, emotional, and psychological distress for children¹ and places them at risk of psychological complications including toxic stress, which in turn contributes to anxiety, behavioral problems, depression, and lifelong health consequences.² The emotional and psychological impact of family separation also manifests physically in children. In the immediate moments of separation, children’s cortisol levels (“the stress hormone”) skyrocket, their blood pressure rises, and their heart rates accelerate.³ In the long term, this emotional distress manifests as post-traumatic stress disorder.⁴ The foster system is purportedly intended to protect children’s wellbeing – but research increasingly shows it causes great long-term harm to the children it is meant to serve.

Preventative measures that address the root causes of family stress—such as financial hardship, housing instability, and lack of access to healthcare—are far more effective at promoting child safety and

¹ Stewart, Re-Envisioning Child Well-Being: Dismantling the Inequitable Intersections Among Child Welfare, Juvenile Justice, and Education, 12 Colum J Race & L 630, 639 (2022), citing Trivedi, The Harm of Child Removal, 43 NYU Rev L & Soc Change 523, 531-32 (2019); Papovich, Trauma & Children in Foster Care: A Comprehensive Review, Forensic Scholars Today (July 10, 2019), available at <<https://rb.gy/yh9bwc>> (accessed March 26, 2025).

² Re-Envisioning Child Well-Being, 12 Colum J Race & L at 639.

³ Wan, What Separation from Parents Does to Children: “The Effect is Catastrophic”, Washington Post (June 18, 2018), available at <<https://rb.gy/gu57t5>> (accessed March 26, 2025).

⁴ Ducharme, “What This Amounts to Is Child Abuse” Psychologists Warn Against Separating Kids from Their Parents, TIME (June 19, 2018), available at <<https://time.com/5316030/kids-separation-parents-psychological-harm/>> (accessed March 26, 2025). See also Re-Envisioning Child Well-Being, 12 Colum J Race & L at 639 (discussing ongoing separation from parents causing lifelong health consequences).



wellbeing than reactive interventions that focus on family separation. The Family Resilience Pilot Project will ensure that families in Hawai'i have access to concrete supports they need to thrive, like food and shelter, community-based resource centers staffed by individuals with lived experience, and housing, childcare, and physical and mental health care.

One of the recurring themes throughout the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group community meetings was parents sharing that they knew they needed help – such as food, shelter, childcare, therapy, parenting classes – but faced barriers to accessing support. Indeed, often support was only made available once parents had a child welfare case opened against them – once they and their children had been through the traumatic experience of removal and foster placement.

By focusing on building resilience and concrete supports within families and communities, this bill responds to the heartfelt requests families made during the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group for support rather than separation and punishment. SB 952 represents an essential shift towards a more compassionate, evidence-based and effective system for caring for our families in Hawai'i. The National Center for Youth Law is in strong support of this bill and respectfully requests that you pass it out of this committee.

Mahalo,
Dana Matsunami
National Center for Youth Law

March 25, 2025

From: Laurie Arial Tochiki, Co-Chair Mālama 'Ohana Working Group

Re: Testimony in support of SB952

I strongly support SB952 Relating to Family Resilience Pilot Program, which provides funding and authority to establish a trauma informed pilot program to model and test the kind of community based, trauma informed, effective program that will provide the support families need in order to avoid the costly interventions of the Child Welfare Services branch that include removal, foster care, and sometimes permanent financial support for children in permanent placement. The concept of a pilot program takes the next step in creating the kind of child welfare system our community needs and wants.

In 2023 the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group was established to develop recommendations to establish a child welfare system that is trauma-informed, sustains a community-based partnership, and responds to the needs of children and families in the system and the community. I serve as Co-Chair of the working group. The working group has completed its work and a full copy of the report can be found at www.malamaohana.net, however the working group is still subject to sunshine law until adjournment sine die. To be clear, the working group will not be making further decisions now that the report has been filed. The working group may meet during the session to provide information to the public about its report but will not make further decisions. Therefore, it is not allowed under sunshine law that more than two of us meet to discuss the report, or next steps. Therefore, I am testifying as a concerned citizen and speaking for the content of the report that was approved by the working group.

Our first task as the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group was to establish an approach to our work by cultivating and modeling the kind of listening and concern that we needed for our working group and modeling the type of child welfare system we hope for. From there, we began with the intense work of interviewing individuals, conducting conversations, and holding group discussions in Permitted Interaction Groups, which helped shape our initial understanding. We then conducted eleven community listening sessions throughout the state, gathering stories and ideas from each community we visited. Perhaps the most emphatic hope expressed was for a system that helps families before crises occur. Community members want clear, accessible pathways for families to get help without fear of punishment or child removal. They envision a network of community-based resource centers (Ka Piko) where families can access concrete supports like housing assistance, food, transportation, and childcare. These centers would offer comprehensive family strengthening programs and universal parent support services that any family could access. Key components of the Ka Piko network would be peer support and assistance with accessing services.

This pilot program will help implement the recommendations of the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group in tangible ways, building upon the mandate of a trauma informed state and the innovative and impactful work of the Office of Wellness and Resilience.

The Pilot Program is a preventative, supportive space that keeps families stable, reduces reliance on government agencies, and offers accessible, community-driven solutions to family challenges. By providing immediate assistance and long-term support, these centers would reduce family stressors, minimize child removals, and help families heal and thrive. We recommend that the Pilot Program explore opportunities to utilize TANF reserves, and other resources that can maximize the impact of these funds and save money in the future.

We are grateful for your support of the families and children in the child welfare system, and your efforts to find ways to improve the system.

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 10:34:35 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/27/2025 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deb Marois	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Senators,

My name is Deb Marois and I am I am a resident of Makawao, Hawai‘i. I am submitting testimony in support of SB952, relating to child welfare services. I have worked in health and human services for more than 30 years. I currently serve as a consultant and coordinator for Ho‘oikaika Partnership, a coalition dedicated to preventing child maltreatment and strengthening families so all our ‘ohana are healthy, safe and supported in Maui County.

Last year, the Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group (MOWG) conducted extensive listening sessions across the state to inform recommendations for transforming the child welfare system. The final report calls for more programs and concrete support to strengthen family resilience. In Maui County, Ho‘oikaika Partnership has worked together to establish “navigation services” to help families access community resources and provide emergency assistance to prevent crisis and help stabilize their lives. Nearly 500 families participated in 2024, demonstrating the high need for such support. Despite the success of this approach, there is currently no dedicated, sustainable funding for this type of program.

The high cost of living, working multiple jobs or experiencing unemployment, unstable housing and overall economic uncertainty puts major stress on families, which in turn increases the risk of child maltreatment. The provisions of programs that focus on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support for families are key to stabilizing families in crisis. I urge you to pass this bill which would establish a pilot program that would provide supports to families to help prevent entry or reentry into the child welfare system.

If you would like additional information, please contact me at deb@convergecert.com.

Mahalo for your time and consideration,

Deb Marois

Maui Resident, Community Development Consultant, Ho‘oikaika Partner

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 3:26:52 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/27/2025 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Andrea Dias-Machado	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Andrea Dias-Machado. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of SB952, which requires the Department of Human Services, in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience, to design a 5-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program to support families and children involved—or at risk of reinvolvement with—child welfare services.

I SUPPORT SB952 because of the impact it will have on my community. If this bill passes, it will provide evidence-based supports to prevent child welfare system involvement. This is the only bill that emerged from the Malama ‘Ohana Working Group Report recommendations that is both still alive and will serve families and communities. MOWG report calls for more programs and concrete support to strengthen family resilience. SB952 offers this through peer support navigators to help connect families with resources, financial and resource assistance for families, and parenting support. The provisions of such programs and resources are key to stabilizing families in crisis, focusing on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support for families.

Mahalo for your time and consideration of this important issue. I respectfully request that you pass this bill out of committee so that all families in Hawai’i have the resources they need.

Mahalo nui,

Andrea Dias-Machado

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/25/2025 4:02:56 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/27/2025 3:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Keola Pagud	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha mai e Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the House Committee on Finance,

My name is Keola Pagud, I am a lived expert who has experienced our state child welfare system. I am now a service provider strengthening youth and families who are involved in this system. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in **SUPPORT** of SB952, which requires the Department of Human Services, in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience, to design a 5-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program to support families and youth involved—or at risk of reinvolvement with—child welfare services.

Involvement in the child welfare system should always be a last resort as systems are not designed to raise children. Peer support professionals within this bill is one element that I would like to underline. As one of the first youth peer supports, I have helped to facilitate growth among youth who wanted to give up on life. Now I am witnessing youth and parent peer support professional continue to scale up and I hear about better outcomes for the people we serve. With the proper support and training, there are many lived experts who want to positively serve those who are struggling and do it better than others. This would be a productive project for OWR and DHS continue to be a leader in prevention harm and neglect.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. I respectfully request that you pass this bill out of committee so that all families in Hawai'i have the resources they need.

Mahalo,

Keola Pagud, MSW

March 25, 2025

To: Rep. Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair, and Rep. Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
House Committee on Finance

From: Karen Worthington, Private Citizen

Re: **SB 952 SD2**: Relating to Child Welfare Services
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 308 and Videoconference, March 27, 2025, 3:30pm

Position: **SUPPORT**

Dear Representative Yamashita, Representative Takenouchi, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of SB 952 SD2, which establishes a five-year CWS diversion and intervention pilot program as a collaborative effort of DHS and the Office of Wellness and Resilience. This innovative program represents a critical shift toward prevention and early intervention that will help strengthen Hawai'i families and reduce the risks of families' involvement with child welfare services. This pilot project responds to recommendations of the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group. The Mālama 'Ohana Working Group final report called for more programs to strengthen families through a holistic approach that includes peer supports and economic and concrete supports.

My name is Karen Worthington, and I am a children's law and policy attorney with a consulting business on Maui, Karen Worthington Consulting. I have worked as a lawyer in and around state systems affecting children and families throughout my 30-year career. I am certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist by the National Association of Counsel for Children. I have worked extensively with Hawai'i state departments and nonprofit organizations that support children and families who exist at the margins of our society.

Please pass SB 952 SD2. This pilot program will strengthen our support for families in several important ways:

- It creates a comprehensive support system that includes peer support navigators with lived experience, who can effectively bridge the gap between families and needed services while building trust through shared understanding.
- It addresses the critical connection between poverty and child welfare involvement by providing immediate financial assistance and concrete supports for basic needs like food, housing, and transportation—supports that can prevent crisis and stabilize families.
- It recognizes, as demonstrated by extensive research, that most families who come to the attention of the child welfare system need support services rather than protective intervention, and it provides those services in a way that strengthens rather than disrupts families.
- It implements evidence-based practices, including peer support services that have been recognized by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services since 2007 as an effective intervention.
- It responds to new federal requirements under Public Law No: 118-258 (enacted January 4, 2025), which allows states to use Title IV-B family preservation funds for “peer-to-peer mentoring and support programs with demonstrated experience fostering constructive relationships between children and families and mentors with relevant lived experience or

Karen Worthington, Kula, HI 96790

interactions with the child welfare system.” (42 USC 629a(a)(1)(G)). Public Law 118-258 also adds a definition of “family support services” which can be provided through Title IV-B funds, providing further support for the pilot program in SB 952 SD2.

The conditions that often lead to child welfare involvement - inadequate food, housing instability, lack of supervision while parents work, or untreated medical conditions - are frequently direct results of economic hardship. This pilot program creates a framework for providing appropriate support rather than unnecessarily involving families in the child welfare system.

The Office of Wellness and Resilience is uniquely positioned to collaborate with DHS in developing and implementing this pilot project. If you would like additional information related to my testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at karen@karenworthington.com.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Worthington". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Karen Worthington

House Committee on Finance
Thursday, March 27, 2025
Conference Room 308

RE: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB952 - RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members of the Finance Committee,

My name is Sara Riggs, and I am a Master of Social Work student at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.* I currently work as a youth therapist in a community mental health setting, and have also previously worked with houseless youth within Hawai'i's school system— experiences that have fueled my passion for advocating for the health and wellbeing of Hawai'i's youth and families. I am therefore writing to express my **strong support for SB952**.

This bill aims to reduce families' involvement with the child welfare system by implementing a pilot program that offers a range of preventative interventions rooted in trauma-informed principles. Notably, it includes a peer mentorship component, where trained individuals with lived experience in the child welfare system assist families. This is essential not only for helping families build trust, but also allowing them to navigate various supports and resources more effectively. The bill also acknowledges the importance of fulfilling essential human needs, such as food, clothing, housing, and childcare. This, in turn, can stabilize families and allow them to focus on strengthening their relationships with their children, therefore minimizing the need for child welfare intervention.

Passing SB952 is a crucial step towards creating a comprehensive, trauma-informed approach to child welfare services— one that is centered on building the resilience of children, families, and communities, rather than relying solely on protective interventions. The pilot program will yield valuable insights into how to reform the system in a way that prioritizes holistic healing, stabilization, and the long-term wellbeing of families and vulnerable youth.

I respectfully urge you to pass SB952. Mahalo nui for your consideration.

Sara Riggs

***Disclaimer:** *The views expressed in this testimony are my own, and are not a reflection of the university I attend.*

House Committee on Finance
Thursday, March 27, 2025
Conference Room 308

RE: Testimony in SUPPORT of SB952 - RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES