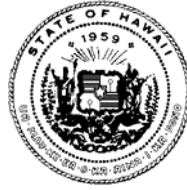


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 10, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: March 11, 2025, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill and provides comments. This measure was similar to the Office of Wellness & Resilience's (OWR) administration measure SB 1399 SD1 that included an appropriation of \$987,150 for each year of the biennium. However, the Committee on Ways and Means (SD2) changed the implementing agency from OWR to DHS. DHS will need additional time to consider and confer with OWR and the Department of Health (DOH) on their resource needs to implement this diversion pilot program with a different target population or different service model than the current DHS CWS diversion program. DHS respectfully requests an extended effective date and that any appropriation not reduce or replace priorities identified in the executive budget.

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

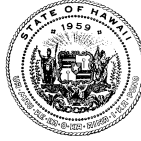
² See, Association of Expanded Child Tax Credit Payments With Child Abuse and Neglect Emergency Department Visits, at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9936349/#:~:text=Question,and%20neglect%2Drelated%20ED%20visits.>

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-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. Now that the implementing agency has changed from OWR to DHS, DHS and OWR will need to discuss the best strategy to stand up a new pilot diversion program that will address needs or use different approaches that are not currently addressed by DHS CWS's existing diversion program. 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 program's benefits or services. DHS will also continue dialogue with OWR regarding opportunities to support peer navigators.

DHS respectfully requests an extended effective date to give DHS, OWR, and DOH time to develop the pilot program.

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



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
415 S.BERETANIA ST. #415
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Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 952 SD2 RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES

Representative Lisa Martin, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

March 11, 2025, at 10:00am a.m., Room Number 329

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 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 SD2 and 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



SB952 SD1 Trauma Informed Care Training

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair

Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Tuesday, Mar 11, 2025: 10:00: Room 329 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports SB952 SD1:

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 (TIC) 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.



HAWAI`I YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

677 Ala Moana Blvd., Suite 904

Honolulu, Hawai`i 96813

Phone: (808) 489-9549

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

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

Judith F. Clark, Executive
Director

Network Membership

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

March 7, 2025

To: Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
And members of the Committee on Human Services and
Homelessness

**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

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 7:07:16 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/11/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marilyn Yamamoto	Hawaii Coalition for Child Protective Reform	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Comments: In support

KAWAIILOA

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai‘i

March 11, 2025

House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

Hearing Time: 10:00 AM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 329

Re: SB952 SD2, Relating to Child Welfare Services

Aloha e Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, 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



Hawai'i Children's Action Network

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 Human Services and Homelessness
Re: SB 952 SD 2 Relating to child welfare services

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference
Tuesday March 11, 2025 10:00AM

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

On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in strong support of SB 952 SD 2, 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 SD 2 952.**

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/17230038622/2024.05.21+MOWG+Hui+Ho%CA%BBopu%CC%84lama+-+Systems+PIG+Pt+2.pdf>).

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:40:07 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/11/2025 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dara Carlin, M.A.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Stand in Support

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 10:09:19 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/11/2025 10:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair Representative Marten, Vice Chair Representative Olds and Members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness.

Please support SB 952 SD 2 as it appears that the pilot program described in this bill will help families and children associated with Child Welfare Services.

Mahalo.

Jennifer Chiwa

Makiki and life long resident of Oahu

SB-952-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/10/2025 6:21:17 PM

Testimony for HSH on 3/11/2025 10:00:00 AM

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

Comments:

Dear Esteemed Members of the Hawaii State Legislature,

I am writing to express my strong support for Senate Bill No. 952, which mandates the Department of Human Services (DHS), in collaboration with the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR), to establish a five-year Child Welfare System Diversion and Intervention Pilot Program. This legislation represents a proactive, evidence-based approach to reducing family involvement with child welfare services (CWS) by addressing root causes through prevention and support. However, I also urge vigilance to mitigate potential corruption risks within DHS, CWS, and related entities like Child and Family Services (CFS), which could undermine this noble effort. I respectfully request your affirmative vote, paired with robust oversight measures, to ensure its success.

The need for this pilot is clear, as evidenced by the following data:

- **Overburdened System:** In 2023, Hawaii’s DHS reported 2,875 substantiated child abuse and neglect cases, an 8% increase from 2020 (Department of Health data), with CWS staff struggling under high caseloads due to persistent vacancies.
- **Cycle of Abuse:** The CDC (2022) found 60% of domestic violence victims experience repeated incidents, often escalating to CWS involvement—a cycle this pilot could disrupt with early intervention.
- **Economic Drivers:** 44% of Hawaii households fall below the ALICE threshold (Aloha United Way, 2022), indicating financial instability as a key risk factor for CWS entry, which the bill’s resource assistance aims to address.
- **Proven Models:** States like California reduced foster care entries by 15% through similar diversion programs (National Institute of Justice, 2022), offering a blueprint for Hawaii to lower its 1,555 monthly foster care cases (2021 average).
- **Trauma Impact:** Trauma-informed care, a cornerstone of this bill, can reduce PTSD rates—70% among severe abuse survivors versus 20-30% for typical assault victims (APA, 2023)—easing strain on mental health services, which saw a 15% rise in crisis calls since 2021 (DOH).

S.B. No. 952’s provisions are well-designed to meet these challenges:

- Peer Support: Trained navigators with lived experience will connect families to public benefits and cultural programs, fostering trust and efficacy.
- Resource Provision: Financial aid for essentials like housing, food, and childcare tackles economic stressors head-on.
- Skill-Building: Trauma-informed coaching on parenting and emotional regulation strengthens caregiver-child bonds, reducing conflict.

The bill’s collaboration between DHS and OWR, with flexibility to contract private entities, leverages expertise and offsets staffing shortages. Its five-year timeline, culminating in a 2030 legislative report, promises actionable insights for systemic reform. However, the unspecified funding (noted as “\$ ___”) and a likely erroneous effective date of December 31, 2050 (surely intended as July 1, 2025), require clarification—perhaps \$7.5M annually and an immediate start—to ensure feasibility.

While I wholeheartedly endorse this initiative, I must caution about the potential for corruption within DHS, CWS, and CFS, which could jeopardize its integrity:

- Historical Concerns: Nationally, child welfare systems have faced scrutiny for mismanagement—e.g., a 2021 audit in California found \$200M in untracked foster care funds (State Auditor). Hawaii’s DHS has not escaped criticism, with reports of delayed case responses due to internal inefficiencies (Honolulu Star-Advertiser, 2022).
- Contracting Risks: Outsourcing to private entities, while practical, opens doors to cronyism or inflated costs without strict oversight. CFS, a frequent DHS partner, has faced allegations elsewhere of prioritizing profit over child welfare (e.g., 2023 lawsuits in Texas).
- Caseload Corruption: Overworked staff may cut corners, misreport outcomes, or favor certain families, especially if funding incentivizes volume over quality—a risk heightened by the bill’s lack of success metrics.

To safeguard this pilot, I urge the legislature to:

- Set Clear Funding: Commit \$7.5M annually for five years, fully funding staff, contracts, and aid.
- Enhance Oversight: Mandate quarterly audits of DHS and contractors, with public reporting to deter misuse.
- Define Metrics: Target a 10-15% reduction in CWS entries, tracked annually, to ensure accountability.
- Fix the Timeline: Amend the effective date to July 1, 2025, for timely action.

S.B. No. 952 offers a transformative opportunity to support Hawaii’s families and reduce the human and fiscal toll of child welfare involvement. With proper funding, execution, and safeguards against corruption, it could set a national standard. I respectfully urge your support, tempered by vigilance, to make this vision a reality. Thank you for your commitment to our keiki and ohana.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.