

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
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DEPT. COMM. NO. 325

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STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
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TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
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January 13, 2025

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi, President
and Members of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 409
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Nadine K. Nakamura, Speaker
and Members of the House of
Representatives
Thirty-Third State Legislature
State Capitol, Room 431
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Nakamura, and Members of the Legislature:

Enclosed is the report submitted in accordance with the provisions of Act 177, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2018, Relating to the East Hawaii Child Welfare Services Pilot Project.

Per section 93-16, HRS, this report will be available to review electronically at the Department's website, at <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/reports/legislative-reports/>. For questions regarding this report, contact Daisy Hartsfield, Division Administrator, Social Services Division, at dhartsfield@dhs.hawaii.gov.

Sincerely,

Ryan I. Yamane
Director

Enclosure

c: Governor's Office
Lieutenant Governor's Office
Department of Budget and Finance
Legislative Auditor
Legislative Reference Bureau Library (1 hard copy)
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**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-THIRD HAWAII STATE
LEGISLATURE 2025**

**IN ACCORDANCE WITH
ACT 177, SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2018, RELATED TO
THE EAST HAWAII CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PILOT PROJECT**

**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
Social Services Division, Child Welfare Services Branch
January 2025**

This report is submitted pursuant to the provisions of Act 177, Session Laws of Hawaii 2018 (Act 177), related to the East Hawaii Child Welfare Pilot Project.

I. Purpose

In 2018, Act 177 established a five-year pilot project within the Department of Human Services (DHS) to ensure the safety and well-being of children who were at risk of abuse and neglect and their families in East Hawaii. Act 177 appropriated funds for four full-time caseworker positions, the associated administrative costs, and the costs to train the new staff.

II. Act 177 (SLH 2018) Positions

The four caseworker positions were all filled at various points during this pilot project. In SFY 2024, two of the positions were vacant for the entire year; one was filled for the whole year, and the other was filled on and off.

The East Hawaii CWS section's November 2024 position inventory indicates 43 positions with ten vacancies. Eight of the ten vacancies are caseworker positions, which affects family outcomes.

Point-in-Time November	Total Number of Vacant Positions (both caseworker and non-caseworker positions)
2019	5
2020	11
2021	9
2022	13
2023	9
2024	10

III. Caseload

There has been an increase in caseloads in East Hawaii over the past year, likely due to the caseworker vacancies. As of December 2024, the breakdown of cases managed ranges from 15 to 36 cases per permanency caseworker. This is high, and the caseloads have trended upward throughout this period.

Point-in-Time December	Caseloads for Permanency Caseworkers
2019	10 – 22
2020	10 – 18
2021	10 – 18
2022	15 - 24

Point-in-Time December	Caseloads for Permanency Caseworkers
2023	24 - 36
2025	15 - 36

Numerous variables impact caseworker caseloads, including vacancy rates, recruitment efforts, the implementation of the new CWS programs, efforts to improve relationships between CWS and the Judiciary, changes in CWS leadership, continuing COVID-19 pandemic impacts on health and economics, modifications to CWS procedures, media coverage of child abuse cases, and changes in community access to resources.

IV. Findings of Performance and Employee Satisfaction Evaluations

Although challenged by high caseloads and vacancies, caseworkers have maintained monthly visits to children, adoptions are being processed, and complaints about staff have decreased. The Family Court imposed two financial sanctions in the calendar year 2024.

DHS surveyed East Hawaii CWS staff in 2022 to measure the change in satisfaction due to the size of their caseload and the effects on staff performance, satisfaction, and attrition.

Thirty-six individuals completed the staff survey in 2022. Of those respondents, twelve staff had worked at Child Welfare Services for 11-35 years. Additionally, 55% of staff (20 individuals) planned on remaining with CWS for at least the next five years.

A survey question asked whether they felt a reduction in their workload/caseload between January 2020 and January 2022. Three caseworkers indicated they felt a reduction in caseload. The remaining thirty-three respondents did not report feeling a reduction in workload/caseload.

When asked what about changes to improve the CWS work environment for staff, the East Hawaii staff shared the following suggestions:

- hire more staff,
- raise salaries,
- add more specialist positions,
- improve office space,
- allow more teleworking,
- implement shortage differential pay,
- improve in-person meetings and training,
- create additional units,
- eliminate hiring freeze, and
- add a higher level for support staff (level V).

V. Court Sanctions for Late Reports

Calendar Year (CY)	Number of Court Sanctions
2013	2
2014	0
2015	0
2016	1
2017*	5
2018	21
2019	6
2020	0
2021	5
2022	0
2023^	1
2024	2

*September to December 2017 information is based on supervisors' recollection.

^In CY 2023, the CWS East Hawaii section was sanctioned once by the court due to a late court report. In addition, in CY 2023, due to late court reports and/or other concerns (e.g., lack of consistent contact with the family), the judge gave an Order to Show Cause (OSC) to the East Hawaii section approximately five times.

VI. Legal Claims

Currently, there are three active civil lawsuits stemming from cases in East Hawaii; two cases were previously included in prior legislative reports.

CY	Total Number of Litigated Cases~
2019	2
2020	2
2021	1
2022	2
2023	3
2024	2

~The total number of cases may be duplicated cases that carry over to the following year.

VII. Additional Comments

Anecdotal evidence from CWS staff at all levels, community members, social service agency staff, employees from other State agencies, and family court representatives strongly suggests that when these additional caseworker positions are filled, cases are better managed, and children and families have better outcomes. The struggle is in filling the positions and retaining the staff.