

MAR 07 2025

SENATE RESOLUTION

URGING THE LEGISLATURE TO CONDUCT MANDATORY INQUIRIES INTO ALL FATALITIES AND SERIOUS INJURIES THAT OCCURRED TO CHILDREN INVOLVED IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.

1 WHEREAS, the Department of Human Services (DHS), Child
2 Welfare Services Branch has experienced a troubling number of
3 child fatalities and serious injuries resulting from systemic
4 failures, including neglect in foster care placements and unsafe
5 reunifications; and

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7 WHEREAS, nineteen child fatalities or serious injuries have
8 been reported since 1997 and over ten million dollars have been
9 paid out in lawsuits so far; and

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11 WHEREAS, in the case of Reubynne, who was beaten in 1997 and
12 is still in a vegetative state, DHS was sued for negligence and
13 settled for two million dollars; and

14
15 WHEREAS, in the case of Peter Boy Kema, who was murdered in
16 1997 though his body was never found, his family was involved in
17 multiple Child Welfare Services cases and ultimately reunified;
18 however, a Special Master's report states that the Department
19 should never have reunified, the father was convicted, and a
20 lawsuit is pending; and

21
22 WHEREAS, in 1999 a Waianae family was given permanent
23 guardianship over a group of children, who after reaching
24 adulthood, successfully sued DHS following the parents'
25 conviction for assault and sexual abuse in 2005; and

26
27 WHEREAS, in the case of Alexis Cabantang, who was left with
28 permanent disabilities after she was beaten and nearly died in
29 2005, her guardian was sentenced to twenty years in prison and
30 the Department of Education was successfully sued for failure to
31 report her injuries to Child Welfare Services; and

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1 WHEREAS, in the case of Cyrus Belt, who was thrown over a
2 freeway overpass in Honolulu in 2008, the responsible party was
3 sentenced to life in prison and DHS settled a lawsuit brought by
4 the father for not intervening despite having been notified six
5 days prior that the mother was using methamphetamine; and
6

7 WHEREAS, in the case of Braden McVeigh, who was murdered in
8 2009 after being reunited with his father over the objections of
9 the grandmother, DHS was successfully sued; and
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11 WHEREAS, in 2012, Zion McKeown was beaten to death at the
12 age of four after being reunified with the parents despite
13 multiple warnings against reunification; and
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15 WHEREAS, in the case of Ronela Pascual, who was critically
16 injured in 2008 after reunification which left her unable to
17 communicate until her death in 2013 at the age of eleven; and
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19 WHEREAS, in the case of Zachary Durto-Burgess, who was
20 beaten to death after being reunified with his parents in 2010,
21 his parents were sentenced to life in prison; and
22

23 WHEREAS, Zack Morris was convicted of sexual abuse and DHS
24 was successfully sued by the boys who were placed in his foster
25 home despite suspicions of child abuse in other states; and
26

27 WHEREAS, Fabian Garcia died in her foster home on Big
28 Island due to blunt force trauma and has yet to receive justice;
29 and
30

31 WHEREAS, Shaelyn Stone was withdrawn from public school and
32 died of starvation in 2017; thereafter, her parents and
33 grandparent were all convicted of manslaughter; and
34

35 WHEREAS, a seven day old infant died of brain damage at
36 Tripler Hospital after an older sibling similarly died of
37 injuries, and the parents were later convicted of murder for
38 both children in 2020; and
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40 WHEREAS, in 2020 a lawsuit was filed against DHS for
41 overlooking systemic abuse in a foster home where the eleven
42 adopted children were forced into slave labor, molested, and



1 starved before a teen child ultimately killed the abusive
2 adoptive mother; and

3
4 WHEREAS, Ariel Sellers was murdered in 2021 at the age of
5 six after being starved, gagged, and kept in a dog cage by her
6 adoptive parents who are currently in jail awaiting second
7 degree murder charges; and

8
9 WHEREAS, in 2021 an infant was declared deceased after
10 Child Welfare Services had been called in to investigate the
11 situation months earlier but decided not to open a case; and

12
13 WHEREAS, Bula Mahoe was charged with sexual abuse of his
14 parents' foster children; and

15
16 WHEREAS, Caitano used foster children to conduct an illegal
17 drug ring in 2022, and was ultimately indicted for that offense
18 along with sexual abuse and physical abuse; and

19
20 WHEREAS, Geanna Bradley was found dead in her home in 2024
21 after being starved and physically abused by her guardians, who
22 are now charged with second degree murder, and another child in
23 the home was found in very serious condition; and

24
25 WHEREAS, repeated failures to act upon warnings and ensure
26 child safety have resulted in preventable deaths and injuries;
27 and

28
29 WHEREAS, despite a 2005 policy directive (DHS 2005-PA-3)
30 requiring safety concerns to be immediately reported to judges,
31 these warnings have often been ignored; and

32
33 WHEREAS, lawsuits for some of the child fatality and
34 serious injury cases have been successful, but they are complex,
35 expensive, and time-consuming, while in the meantime, there is
36 no assurance that preventative measures have been taken by DHS;
37 and

38
39 WHEREAS, Hawaii does have a child death review panel per
40 the federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA)
41 requirements, but there is no disclosure to the public or



1 assurance that the circumstances of a death or injury have been
2 addressed for future prevention; and

3
4 WHEREAS, unlike Hawaii, states like California, Florida,
5 and Colorado publish detailed information online about such
6 cases and some even mandate these disclosures to ensure
7 transparency and accountability, particularly when there has
8 been previous state involvement; and

9
10 WHEREAS, studies of child deaths over decades have resulted
11 in four main causes:

- 12
13 (1) Failure of communication between staff and agencies;
14
15 (2) Inexperience and lack of skill of individual social
16 workers;
17
18 (3) Failure to follow established procedures; and
19
20 (4) Inadequate resources to meet demands; now, therefore,

21
22 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-third
23 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2025,
24 that the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services and House
25 Committee on Human Services and Homelessness are urged to
26 conduct mandatory inquiries into all fatalities and serious
27 injuries that occurred to children involved in Child Welfare
28 Services; and

29
30 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that these inquiries must include a
31 comprehensive review of systemic failures, resource allocation,
32 departmental accountability, and the identification of measures
33 to prevent further harm; and

34
35 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the goal of these inquiries
36 should be to ensure full transparency, prompt and thorough
37 action, and the establishment of safeguards that prioritize the
38 safety and well-being of all children under the Department of
39 Human Services' care; and

40
41 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Legislature is committed to
42 enacting laws in response to the results of the mandated



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1 inquiries that ensure similar transparency and accountability as
2 seen in other states, such as Colorado, to uphold the public
3 trust and prevent future tragedies; and
4

5 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that certified copies of this
6 Resolution be transmitted to the Director of Human Services,
7 President of the Senate, Speaker of the House of
8 Representatives, Chair of the Senate Committee on Health and
9 Human Services, and Chair of the House Committee on Human
10 Services and Homelessness.
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13

OFFERED BY: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive name followed by a vertical line.