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**A BILL FOR AN ACT**

RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1           SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the health and  
2 development of children under age five is critical to  
3 strengthening Hawaii's communities. There are approximately  
4 twenty-nine thousand keiki from birth to age five in Hawaii with  
5 mental health needs. The legislature also finds that early  
6 mental health issues are caused by biological and developmental  
7 special needs at birth, child abuse and neglect, exposure to  
8 intimate partner violence, parental substance abuse, housing  
9 insecurity, and poverty. These mental health issues result in  
10 social and emotional development delays that negatively impact  
11 adult and child relationships, peer interactions, and the  
12 ability to manage emotions appropriately. Without a system of  
13 services and supports in place, children with mental health  
14 needs are at risk for future behavioral and academic issues.

15           Furthermore, the legislature finds that interventions at an  
16 early stage of life can result in future cost savings for  
17 special education, mental health treatment, juvenile justice,  
18 and incarceration. The legislature further finds that parents,

1 pediatricians, home visitors, and child care providers can be  
2 the first responders to mental health concerns. Identifying  
3 problems early and intervening before they increase in severity  
4 will provide the best chance of helping young children with  
5 mental health needs succeed and lead healthy and happy lives.

6       Additionally, the legislature finds that unmet childhood  
7 mental health needs were on the rise before the COVID-19  
8 pandemic and have since worsened. In a preliminary study,  
9 published by the Journal of the American Medical Association,  
10 Columbia University researchers found that compared to babies  
11 born just before the COVID-19 pandemic, babies born during the  
12 first year of the pandemic scored lower on a developmental  
13 screening test of social and motor skills at six months  
14 regardless of whether their mothers contracted COVID-19 during  
15 pregnancy. See Shuffrey LC, Firestein MR, Kyle MH, et al.,  
16 Association of Birth During the COVID-19 Pandemic With  
17 Neurodevelopmental Status at 6 Months in Infants With and  
18 Without In-Utero Exposure to Maternal SARS-CoV-2 Infection.  
19 JAMA Pediatr. 2022. Other factors, including fewer play dates  
20 and altered interactions with stressed caregivers, may help  
21 explain why babies born during the pandemic have weaker social  
22 and motor skills than babies born before the pandemic.

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1           The legislature also finds that the COVID-19 pandemic and  
2 its economic impacts have disproportionately affected groups  
3 already experiencing disparities and inequities. Native  
4 Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders do not have equitable access to  
5 preventive care, services, and treatment to address physical and  
6 mental health needs. These inequities contribute to family  
7 stress, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences, and  
8 they perpetuate intergenerational and historical trauma.

9           The purpose of this Act is to create an infant and early  
10 childhood mental health program in the department of health.

11           SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is  
12 amended by adding a new section to part XXV to be appropriately  
13 designated and to read as follows:

14           "§321-     **Infant and early childhood mental health program;**  
15 **established.** (a) There is established within the department of  
16 health the infant and early childhood mental health program,  
17 which shall provide and support mental health services for  
18 children from birth to age five so they can form close and  
19 secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and  
20 express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment  
21 and learn, all in the context of family, community, and culture.



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**Report Title:**

Department of Health; Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program; Established

**Description:**

Establishes the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program within the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five, develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

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JUSTIFICATION SHEET

DEPARTMENT: Governor

TITLE: A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

PURPOSE: Establish an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program in the Department of Health.

MEANS: Add a new section to chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

JUSTIFICATION: Approximately twenty-nine thousand keiki from birth to age five in Hawaii have mental health needs due to biological or developmental special needs at birth, exposure to intimate partner violence, parental substance abuse, housing insecurity, and poverty. Because these needs are often untreated, these children are more likely to be expelled or suspended from preschool, be ill-prepared for kindergarten, and require special education services. Later in life, some of these children may be involved with the juvenile and adult justice systems and be at higher risk for self-harm and suicide due to depression and anxiety.

Meanwhile, Hawaii does not have enough mental health professionals to address community needs, much less the specialized skills necessary for infant and early childhood mental health.

As a result, establishing an infant and early childhood mental health program in the Department of Health will provide the leadership and coordination to improve accessibility, capacity, and quality of infant and early childhood mental health services and address the numerous unmet needs of keiki and families in Hawaii.

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Impact on the public: Improved short- and long-term economic, health, and social benefits to children and families in Hawaii.

Impact on the department and other agencies:  
None.

GENERAL FUND: \$800,000 appropriation for fiscal year 2023-2024 and \$1,700,000 for fiscal year 2024-2025.

OTHER FUNDS: Potential contributions from private philanthropic organizations.

PPBS PROGRAM DESIGNATION: HTH-560.

OTHER AFFECTED AGENCIES: Department of Human Services, Department of Education, Office of Wellness and Resilience.

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2023.