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**Testimony of the Office of the Public Defender,
State of Hawaii to the House Committee on Finance**

February 24, 2025

H.B. 613 HD1: RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH.

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

The Office of the Public Defender **strongly supports H.B. 613 HD1.**

The Office of the Public Defender works with youth involved in the criminal justice system. We have seen an increase in youth experiencing homelessness. We agree that we can do better as a community to help and provide supportive and safety services to our youth experiencing homelessness across the State of Hawaii. Our homeless youth need help with basic needs, access to education, access to transportation, access to mental health services, access to a safe and secure place to live, access to substance abuse treatment, and access to basic health care. We need more outreach options and shelter options with skilled and caring providers. These needs impact every Island in our State. In particular, we are concerned that if these services are not available and these needs are not met on our Neighbor Islands, then children who end up in our criminal justice system will end up in detention on the Island of Oahu – far from access to family or their home island support systems – thus exacerbating trauma and disenfranchisement for homeless youth. We submit that developing and providing safe spaces for our homeless youth can only help lift up youth and families in distress and can prevent youth from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this measure.

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

February 22, 2025

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

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 613 HD1 – RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH.**

Hearing: February 24, 2025, 12:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308, & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure, which is now like administration measure HB1101. DHS defers to the Office of Youth Services regarding its resource needs and offers comments.

PURPOSE: This bill makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1).

DHS appreciates the Committee on Human Services & Homelessness' amendments:

- (1) Inserting language to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent program within the Office of Youth Services;
- (2) Replacing the appropriation to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth throughout the State with an appropriation to fund the permanent Safe Spaces for Youth Program within the Office of Youth Services;
- (3) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (4) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

In its committee report, the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness included appropriation requests of \$841,016 for fiscal year 2025-2026 and \$871,016 for fiscal year 2026-2027, and we defer to the Office of Youth Services on the appropriation amount.

OYS is implementing the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program authorized by Act 130, Session Laws of Hawaii 2022 (Act 130). Act 130 will be repealed on June 30, 2025, and this measure codifies the Safe Spaces for Youth Program in Hawaii Revised Statutes.

Since Act 130 passed, OYS has moved forward with implementing the Safe Spaces for Youth program that aims to establish Safe Spaces homeless youth shelters in each county and the Safe Place Network access points. The Safe Spaces homeless shelters will work with the Safe Place Network access points identified in the community where youth and young adults up to age 24 can enter and ask for assistance. With additional funding, OYS is poised to establish a shelter for young adults ages 18-24 on Hawaii Island. In addition to codification, a general fund appropriation is required for OYS to take the next steps.

According to the National Network for Youth, communities with established Safe Spaces for homeless youth report higher success rates in terms of improved housing stability, increased school enrollment, and a reduction in risky behaviors. By making the Safe Spaces for Youth program permanent, Hawaii can continue to build upon the pilot's progress and ensure the safety and stability of at-risk youth.

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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



LEANNE GILLESPIE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
LUNA HO'OKELE

Phone: (808) 587-5710
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STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
OFFICE OF YOUTH SERVICES
KE'ENA LAWELAWE 'ŌPIO
1010 Richards Street, Suite 314
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

February 22, 2025

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

FROM: Leanne Gillespie, Executive Director

SUBJECT: HB 613 HD1 – RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH
Hearing: February 24, 2025, 12:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Office of Youth Services (OYS) strongly supports this bill and offers comments.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this bill is to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services and appropriates funds.

The Safe Spaces for Youth Program, a three-year pilot project is due to repeal 6/30/2025.

The Safe Spaces for Youth Program requires the Office of Youth Services to open Safe Space youth homeless shelters in each county. During the three-year pilot project, the Office of Youth Services has worked with both government and community-based organizations to build a robust and comprehensive program plan for the Safe Spaces Program that expects to make meaningfully progress in reducing youth homelessness across the State.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AGENCY

The minimum cost to operate one emergency shelter, with the services listed above, is estimated at approximately \$800,000 annually. Variance in costs depends on location, facility expenses, staffing and services offered. With minor children not being allowed to shelter with young adults, Act 130 includes the requirement to open eight shelters, two in each County: Oahu, Hawaii, Maui and Kauai for a total estimated cost of \$6,400,000, not including staffing and administrative and program planning and implementation costs, estimated at an additional \$600,000.

OYS originally requested \$4,496,870 to fund two shelters on Oahu, and one on each of the islands of Maui, Hawaii and Kauai and support other programmatic and administrative costs including two positions. For FY23, OYS received \$600,000, for FY24 \$868,556, and for FY25 \$871,016.

During year one of the Safe Spaces Pilot Project, OYS gathered an inventory of shelter beds, conducted research, and gathered input from community organizations and the needs of homeless youth across the state. The OYS gathered state agencies together to further discuss the needs of youth and this program, including how to collect and share data for emergency shelters that would be opened under this program. With inadequate funding to procure a contract to open a new shelter, OYS increased several of its current residential shelter contracts to quickly add bed space, in the form of available nights, to the then inventory.

During year two of this project, OYS developed a robust and comprehensive Safe Spaces program plan, contracted with the Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN) to develop, and implement the National Safe Place Network's Safe Places, as a component of Hawaii's Safe Spaces Pilot Project. In March 2024, HYSN in partnership with OYS and the National Safe Place Network, gathered stakeholders from around the state together to discuss the problems of, and solutions to, youth homelessness.

During year three, the final year of this project, HYSN received its Safe Place license and local sites were trained and certified as Safe Places to assist minors in need of help. Safe Spaces was officially launched in late Summer 2024 with a Press Release by the Department of Human Services, Office of Youth Services. This press release educated the community about the new Safe Place sites, indicated by a yellow sign, where youth could enter and receive immediate help. These sites included The Salvation Army Family Intervention Services shelter in Hilo and Hale Kipa shelter on Oahu. Phone numbers and a text option for 24/7 response were also activated and available for youth who need assistance. The TXT 4 HELP option is provided as part of the National Safe Place Network’s national line. Local phone numbers are provided by subcontract to The Salvation Army on Hawaii Island and Hale Kipa on Oahu.

Safe Spaces Performance Deliverables	Number
Safe Place Site Recruitment/Training	12
Education & Outreach Presentations	164
Number of Youth Receiving Safe Place Text-4-Help cards	125
Media Coverage	1 press release, 2 live interviews
Website and Social Media	159 website hits, 1200 Facebook fans, 5 Instagram posts
Safe Place Encounters*	
Text4Help	25
Safe Place Sites	0

*Program has been building since inception and is in place to begin accepting youth at Safe Place access sites and Safe Space shelters.

OYS continues to contract with HYSN who continued to recruit additional Safe Place sites and provide education, training, and outreach to build and strengthen this program. Additional contracts continue to fund Safe Spaces minor beds at Safe House residential programs.

OYS, in partnership with HYSN, government and community-based organizations, have developed a robust and comprehensive program plan to meet youth where they are at, to ensure youth and young adults experiencing and at risk for homelessness know where to get help, and can receive the help they need. To make this program plan a reality, additional support will be needed. The state falls short on enough inventory to shelter homeless minors and young adults. With adequate funding, this program can reach its original vision, and OYS can procure contracts for both minor and young adult shelters in all four counties during FY26 and be ready to open statewide Safe Spaces beginning in FY27.

Estimated funding needed to fully implement Safe Spaces in each county as required:

Safe Spaces Program Activity	Annual Estimated Cost
Licensed Minor Shelter on Oahu, Hawaii, Maui, Kauai	\$800,000 ea = \$3,200,000
Young Adult Shelter on Oahu, Hawaii, Maui, Kauai	\$800,000 ea = \$3,200,000
Safe Place 24/7 Response	Oahu = \$181,000 Hawaii, Maui, Kauai (\$85,000 ea) = \$255,000
Safe Place Administration Costs	\$100,000
OYS Children & Youth Program Specialist Position	\$71,016
Total	\$7,007,016

The OYS further requests a general budget appropriation of \$871,016 for FY26 to maintain the current program services and full funding of \$7,017,016 effective FY27 to expand the program to each county as required. In lieu of full funding beginning FY27, the OYS respectfully requests to continue FY26 project funding of \$871,016 and for FY27 increase this by \$970,000 to open a young adult shelter on Hawaii island and increase Safe Place 24/7 response on the Islands of Maui and Kauai, for a total appropriation of \$1,841,016. These funding amounts include contracts for services, one Children and Youth Program Specialist position and administrative costs.

OYS respectfully requests that any general fund appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executed budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and offer comments.



Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus Commission



Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community

Mailing Address: LGBTQ+ Commission, c/o The Department of Human Services,
P.O. Box 339, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96809-0339

Email: hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com
Web: <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/lgbtq-commission/>

February 22, 2025

House Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street, Room 308
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Monday, February 24, 2025, at 12:00 PM

RE: **Strong Support for House Bill 613 HD 1 Relating to Homeless Youth**

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 613 HD 1 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus. (LGBTQ+) Commission.

Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

A significant gap exists in our safety network and service delivery system for unaccompanied homeless youth in Hawai'i. While some programs serve at-risk youth already enrolled in state services—such as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division, the Office of Youth Services for Juvenile Offenders, and Child Welfare Services—there are virtually no overnight emergency shelters for "non-system" unaccompanied youth.

Children under 18 who are kicked out, fleeing violence or abuse, or leaving homes unable to support them often end up on beaches, in parks, or on the streets. A lucky few may find temporary refuge by "couch surfing" with friends, but all remain vulnerable to assault, exploitation, trafficking, and theft. Their medical, mental health, educational, and social needs go unmet, putting them at high risk of falling into crime or long-term homelessness. Lacking life skills, job experience, and resources, many of these youth struggle to transition into stable adulthood. Currently, there are only four transitional beds statewide for unaccompanied minors. Early intervention can help break the cycle of homelessness and help address the long-term problems of our growing homeless population.

Older teenagers (18-19 years old) may be eligible for emergency shelters such as IHS, but these facilities are not designed to meet their needs, leaving them vulnerable to victimization by older, more experienced individuals on the streets. The [Residential Youth Services and Empowerment \(RYSE\)](#) program, operating on O'ahu's Windward side, is the only emergency shelter in the state serving youth ages 18-24, and it is frequently at capacity. No overnight emergency shelters exist for youth under 18.

Proudly established pursuant to Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 369, as enacted through Act 41, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022

HI State LGBTQ+ Commission Testimony in Strong Support of HB 613 HD 1

Widespread Community Support

Service providers—including RYSE, Hale Kipa, Maui Youth and Family Services, Hilo Salvation Army Family Intervention, Hale 'Opio Kaua'i, and Spill the Tea in Honolulu—offer daytime support and outreach but do not operate 24/7 shelters for youth under the age of 18. Both the Hawai'i Youth Services Network and Partners in Care have identified the urgent need for emergency shelters as a key component of the *Coordinated Community Plan to End Youth Homelessness* since 2020.

Recent data underscores this crisis:

- The 2023 *Bridging the Gap Point-in-Time Count* (covering Maui, Kaua'i, and the Big Island) identified 55 homeless youth (ages 18-24) but lacked a method to count those under 18.
- The 2024 *O'ahu Continuum of Care Point-in-Time Count* found 122 unsheltered and unaccompanied youth (ages 18-19) and 12 unsheltered and unaccompanied minors under 17.

Service providers agree that these numbers likely under-represent the true scale of youth homelessness, as minors are often less visible during counts and many teens either do not meet emergency shelter criteria or fear seeking admission to adult shelters.

HB 613: Making Safe Spaces for Youth Permanent

HB 613 takes a critical step forward by making the *Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program* permanent within the Office of Youth Services. This ensures a long-term commitment to providing emergency shelter, outreach, and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth. Additionally, the bill appropriates necessary funds to sustain and expand these essential services.

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission strongly urges your support for HB 613. By securing permanent funding and institutionalizing the Safe Spaces for Youth Program, we can provide the shelter and support needed to protect vulnerable youth and help them transition to stable futures.

Should you or any member of your staff have any questions regarding this testimony you can reach the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission at hawaiiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com.

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Rick Velasquez, LCSW (he/him)
Commissioner

[Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission](#)

The LGBTQ+ Commission was established, "to improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short-range and long-range needs of its members and ensure that there is an effective means of researching, planning, and advocating for the equity of this population in all aspects of state government."



HB613 HD1 Homeless Youth
COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair

Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Thursday, Feb 6, 2025: 10:00: Room 329 Videoconference

Hawaii Substance Abuse Coalition Supports HB613 HD1:

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 understands that youth homelessness in Hawaii will most likely rise due to the lack of affordable housing, financial hardships, and the aftermath of the 2023 Maui wildfires. The pandemic worsened youth homelessness due to economic instability, school closures, and family stress. Especially noteworthy is that Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders are experiencing particularly high rates of unsheltered homelessness as people lost jobs, education support, or housing stability.

HSAC notes that the federal government has allocated funding, including \$188 million for the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, which supports rapid rehousing and other services, of which the Hawaii's Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions wants to secure funding and develop strategies to combat the crisis.

1. **Rising Youth Homelessness** – Many young people face homelessness due to family conflict, abuse, financial hardship, or aging out of foster care. Without stable housing, they are at high risk of exploitation, crime, and mental health issues.
2. **Lack of Safe Alternatives** – Shelters for adults often do not accommodate youth-specific needs. Young people need spaces that provide safety, guidance, and appropriate age support.
3. **Education & Employment Barriers** – Homeless youth struggle to attend school or maintain jobs without stable housing. A shelter can provide stability, allowing them to pursue education and work opportunities.
4. **Mental & Physical Health Risks** – Many homeless youth suffer from untreated trauma, mental illness, or substance abuse. A shelter can offer access to healthcare, counseling, and rehabilitation services.
5. **Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness** – Providing safe housing and support can help youth transition into independent living and prevent chronic homelessness in adulthood.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony and are available for further questions.

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613, HD 1

TO: Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, & FIN Committee Members

FROM: Nikos Leverenz
Policy & Advancement Manager

DATE: February 24, 2025 (12:00 PM)

Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHRC) **strongly supports** HB 613, HD 1, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

HHRC provides homelessness services in Regions 1 and 6 on O'ahu and is a member of [Partners in Care \(PIC\)](#), a planning, coordinating, and advocacy alliance that develops recommendations for programs and services to fill needs within O'ahu's continuum of care for homeless persons.

HHRC provides services to unaccompanied homeless youth, including those who are sexual and gender minorities (SGM). These youth face a range of challenges to their health and well-being compared with their heterosexual peers, including substantially increased risk of hunger, violence, behavioral health challenges, and housing instability. Risks even more pronounced for those who are transgender. A [2018 report from the state Department of Health](#) noted that only 51% of transgender youth typically sleep at the home of their parent or guardian's home, compared with 94% of cisgender youth.

HHRC's mission is to reduce harm, promote health, create wellness, and fight stigma in Hawai'i and the Pacific. We work with many individuals impacted by poverty, housing instability, and other social determinants of health. Many have behavioral health problems, including those related to substance use and mental health conditions, and have also been deeply impacted by trauma related to histories of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



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

February 2, 2025

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

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613 HD1 RELATING TO **HOMELESS YOUTH**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, strongly supports HB 613 Relating to Homeless Youth.

Runaway and homeless youth are the most vulnerable segment of Hawaii's homeless population. This bill addresses the needs and issues of unaccompanied youth who are living on the streets, parks, or beaches without family guidance or support.

Young people run from abusive or neglectful families. They often have untreated mental health or substance abuse issues. And sometimes they are thrown out of their homes by the adults who are supposed to care for and protect them. Living on the street is difficult and dangerous and young people do not choose to do it for fun or adventure.

Homeless youth need street-based outreach, safe emergency shelter, family strengthening services to enable family reunifications, and transitional living services for youth and young adults who cannot be safely reunited with their families. Safe Spaces for Youth can ensure that short-term and longer-term safe and appropriate housing is available statewide.

One element of the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot project is the Safe Place Program. Any young person in crisis on Oahu or Hawaii Island can walk into a Safe Place site or text for help with 24-hour a day response. Hale Kipa, The Salvation Army Family Intervention Services, Parents and Children Together, Work Hawaii, Big Brothers Big Sisters Hawaii, and the Hawaii County Rapid Transit System are among the organizations working together on this project. Without new funding from the legislature, 2 years of planning, training, and outreach will be lost if Safe Place ends on June 30th.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

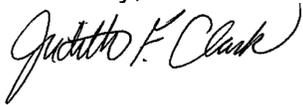
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Judith F. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a prominent flourish at the end.

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Judith F. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and a prominent flourish at the end.

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director



**Where LGBTQIA+ Rights Meet the Labor Movement
A constituency group of the Hawai'i State AFL-CIO**

February 21, 2025

House's Committee on Finance
Hawai'i State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Monday, February 24, 2025 at 12:00 PM

RE: STRONG SUPPORT for House Bill 613 HD 1

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice-Chair Takenouchi and fellow committee members,

Pride at Work – Hawai'i is an official chapter of [Pride at Work](#) which is a national nonprofit organization that represents LGBTQIA+ union members and their allies. We are an officially recognized constituency group of the AFL-CIO that organizes mutual support between the organized Labor Movement and the LGBTQIA+ Community to further social and economic justice.

Pride at Work - Hawai'i strongly supports House Bill 613 HD 1, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services and appropriates funds to provide emergency shelter and services for unaccompanied homeless keiki. This legislation is a crucial step toward ensuring that vulnerable young individuals have access to the stability and support they need to avoid long-term homelessness.

Unaccompanied homeless keiki (especially those under the age of 18) are among the most at-risk members of our community, often facing homelessness due to family rejection, abuse, poverty, or aging out of foster care. Without immediate access to safe shelter and essential resources, these youth are at a heightened risk of exploitation, violence, and severe health challenges.

Research shows that homeless keiki are significantly more likely to become homeless adults without proper intervention. By making the Safe Spaces for Youth Program permanent and continuing to invest in emergency shelter and supportive services, we can interrupt this cycle and provide young people with the opportunities they need to build stable and independent futures.

Hawai'i has a responsibility to protect and support all of its residents, particularly our most vulnerable youth. House Bill 613 ensures that critical services remain available, creating long-term solutions to youth homelessness. By passing this bill, we reaffirm our commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and fostering a future where every young person has a place to call home. Mahalo for your time and consideration.

We urge the Committee to pass HB 613 and take this essential step toward addressing youth homelessness in Hawai'i.

In solidarity,

Michael Golojuch, Jr. (he/him)
President
[Pride at Work – Hawai'i](#)



HB 613, HD1, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

FEBRUARY 24, 2025 · HSH HEARING

POSITION: Support.

RATIONALE: Imua Alliance **supports** HB 613, HD1, relating to homeless youth, which makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

Imua Alliance is a victim service provider for survivors of sex trafficking. Over the past 15 years, we have provided comprehensive direct intervention (victim rescue) services to over 200 victims, successfully emancipating them from slavery and assisting in their restoration, while providing a range of targeted services to over 1,000 victims and individuals at risk of sexual exploitation.

During the pandemic, demand for victim services to our organization has skyrocketed by 330 percent, driven in part by a fivefold increase in direct crisis calls from potential trafficking victims.

Each of the victims we have assisted has suffered from complex and overlapping trauma, including post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety, dissociation, parasuicidal behavior, and substance abuse. Trafficking-related trauma can lead to a complete loss of identity. A victim we cared for in 2016, for example, had become so heavily trauma bonded to her pimp that while under his grasp, she couldn't remember her own name. Yet, sadly, many of the victims with whom we work are misidentified as so-called "voluntary prostitutes" and are subsequently arrested and incarcerated, with no financial resources from which to pay for their release.

Sex trafficking is a profoundly violent crime. At least 23 percent of trafficking victims in Hawai'i report being first exploited before turning 18, according to a recent report, with the average age of trafficked keiki's initial exposure to exploitation being 11. Based on regular outreach and monitoring, we estimate that approximately 150 high-risk sex trafficking establishments operate in Hawai'i. In a recent report conducted by the State Commission on the Status of Women, researchers from Arizona State University found that 1 in every 11 adult males living in our state buys sex online. When visitors are also counted, that number worsens to 1 in every 7 men walking the streets of our island home and a daily online sex buyer market of 18,614 for O'ahu and a total sex buyer population for the island of 74,362, including both tourists and residents.

ASU's findings are grim, but not surprising to local organizations that provide services to survivors of sex trafficking. Imua Alliance, for example, has trained volunteers to perform outreach to victims in high-risk locations, like strip clubs, massage parlors, and hostess bars. More than 80 percent of runaway youth report being approached for sexual exploitation while on the run, over 30 percent of whom are targeted within the first 48 hours of leaving home. With regard to mental health, sex trafficking victims are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD as a soldier in a war zone.

Greater than 80 percent of victims report being repeatedly raped and 95 percent report being physically assaulted, numbers that are underreported, according to the United States Department of State and numerous trauma specialists, because of the inability of many victims to recognize sexual violence. As one underage survivor told Imua Alliance prior to being rescued, "I can't be raped. Only good girls can be raped. I'm a bad girl. If I *want* to be raped, I have to *earn* it."

Furthermore, over 30 percent of juvenile arrests in Hawai'i are for running away from home, the highest proportion in the nation. Nationally, one in seven young people between the ages of 10 and 18 will run away. Approximately 75 percent of runaways are female, while 46 percent of runaway and homeless youth report being physically abused, 38 percent report being emotionally abused, and 17 percent report being forced into unwanted sexual activity by a family or household member, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Roughly 30 percent of runaway children will be approached for sexual exploitation within 48 hours of being on the run, according to the National Center for Missing and Exploited

Children, with over 80 percent being approached for the commercial sex trade during the course of their time on streets. A federal study found that an estimated 38,600 runaway youth have been sexually assaulted, in the company of someone known to be sexually abusive, or engaged in sexual activity in exchange for money, food, or shelter.

Runaways are perceived as easy targets for sex traffickers because they lack stable shelter, a supportive environment, and financial resources, placing them at greater risk of forced prostitution and sexual servitude. Traffickers exploit our limited number of available shelter beds to lure young people into exploitation. As the homeless childcare provider Covenant House observes, traffickers tell homeless youth that shelters are full and ask, “Where are you going to go? Why don’t you come with me? I’ll take care of you.” Coupled with threats of and actual physical and sexual violence against the victims or their families, these coercive techniques compel runaway youth to remain enslaved.

LGBTQ+ youth, who comprise an estimated 40 percent of the runaway and homeless youth population in the United States, are exponentially more likely to fall prey to human traffickers because of discrimination, family and community trauma, and a longing for comfort and acceptance (an estimated 26 percent of LGBTQ adolescents are rejected by their families and put out of their homes simply for being open and honest about who they are). In providing care for victims of human trafficking, we have heard their stories hundreds of times.

Accordingly, **we support measures to advance our state’s fight against sexual servitude, including this bill’s extension of the Safe Places for Youth Pilot Program.** When we establish safe spaces for vulnerable young individuals to receive the care they need, we take steps to prevent the conditions from which exploitation arises.

Contact us at imuaalliance.org/contact



TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB613, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE
February 24, 2025

Aloha Chair Yamashita and Vice Chair Takenouchi and Members of the House Finance Committee:

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** HB613, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH. Pursuant to the Platform of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i, the Party believes housing is a human right. We believe that houselessness is the symptom of an inequitable economic system that creates generational poverty and hardship and believe this system must be changed.

HB 613 seeks to appropriate funding to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth across the State of Hawai'i.

Hawai'i is facing a crisis in homelessness, with our youngest community members bearing hardship. In Hawai'i, one in ten young adults (ages 18-25) and one in thirty adolescents (ages 13-17) experiencing some form of homelessness without the support of a parent or guardian. These young individuals are among the most vulnerable members of our community, facing heightened risks of mental health struggles, substance abuse, sexual exploitation, physical violence, and disruptions in their education.

The data underscores the urgency of this issue:

- 69% of homeless youth report mental health challenges.
- 50% have been in the juvenile justice system, jail, or detention.
- LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness face disproportionately high rates of violence and victimization, with 62% reporting physical harm.

Despite these alarming statistics, existing outreach and shelter resources remain limited, leaving many unaccompanied youth without access to critical services. This bill directly addresses this gap by ensuring funding for emergency shelters and essential services across our islands.

By passing this bill, the Legislature will take a crucial step in breaking the cycle of youth homelessness and protecting Hawai'i's future generations. Providing stable shelter, food security, mental health support, and pathways to education and employment will empower these youth to build self-sufficient and productive lives.

The Democratic Party of Hawai'i urges the Committee to pass this measure to ensure that unaccompanied homeless youth receive the care and support they desperately need.

Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB613, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH. Should you have any questions or require further information, please contact the Democratic Party of Hawai'i at legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:12:18 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Carolyn Martinez-Golojuch, MSW	Rainbow Family 808	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, and Members of the Committees,

My name is Carolyn Martinez-Golojuch, and I am here today as a mother, an advocate, and a fierce protector of our keiki. I am testifying in strong support of House Bill 613 because I believe no child should ever have to sleep on the streets, alone and unprotected.

Every child deserves a safe place to turn to in times of crisis. Yet, right now, in our state, too many unaccompanied minors—children under 18—are left with nowhere to go. Some have escaped abuse, some have been abandoned, and others have been forced into homelessness due to circumstances beyond their control. They need help, but instead, they face impossible barriers to accessing shelter and support. That is unacceptable.

House Bill 613 makes the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent lifeline, ensuring that at-risk youth have a place to go where they are safe, supported, and given the resources they need to rebuild their lives. This bill does more than extend a program—it makes a promise to our children that they will not be forgotten.

But we must go further. We must ensure that these spaces operate as low-barrier shelters so that no child is turned away due to bureaucracy or rigid requirements. Too often, youth shelters impose rules that unintentionally exclude the very kids who need them most—rules about parental consent, documentation, or other red tape that leave minors with no safe options. If we truly want to protect our children, we must make it as easy as possible for them to access emergency shelter without unnecessary obstacles.

I urge this committee to pass House Bill 613 and commit to fully funding these essential services. The cost of inaction is far too high. Every day a child spends on the streets, they are at greater risk of exploitation, trafficking, and violence. As a mother, I cannot stand by and watch that happen. As lawmakers, neither should you.

Please, vote yes on House Bill 613. Give our children a safe place to turn when they need it most.

Mahalo nui loa,

Carolyn Martinez-Golojuch, MSW

President and Founder
Rainbow Family 808

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

KAWAIILOA

February 24, 2025

House Committee on Finance

Hearing Time: 12 pm

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 308

Re: HB613, HD1, Relating to The Homeless Youth

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 **support of HB613, HD1, Relating to Homeless Youth**. This bill has been amended to insert language to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program a permanent program within the Office of Youth Services and replacing the appropriation to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth throughout the State with an appropriation to fund the permanent Safe Spaces for Youth Program within the Office of Youth Services.

Prioritizing resources for homeless youth is essential to address the challenges that perpetuate cycles of poverty and recidivism. Youth homelessness is not merely a lack of shelter and often stems from unfulfilled needs, such as access to comprehensive mental health services, common support systems, or education. These resources are particularly critical for youth with mental health issues or LGBTQ+ individuals, who often experience higher rates of physical harm while homeless. Increased funding for shelter, along with proper shelter and targeted services, can help vulnerable homeless youth avoid high-risk situations and potential encounters with the justice system. By investing in systems of stability and long-term support for homeless youth, we can give them the opportunity to forego the destructive cycle of homelessness and build secure futures.

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 HB613, HD1.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2025 1:52:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
C. Spengler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

In 2023, Hawai'i had the third-highest rate of homeless youth staying unsheltered. It is so important for a minor to be staying in a safe and sheltered environment. Homeless youth have a major disadvantage in shelters that makes them vulnerable. Without a proper guardian and safe care, they can be targeted both on and off the streets by non-minors. This is very dangerous, and there needs to be more safe shelters for unaccompanied homeless youth because they do not deserve to be on the streets or in an unsafe environment.

Thank you for your consideration,

C. Spengler

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2025 10:18:09 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Karen L Worthington	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Representatives,

Please vote to support HB613 Relating to Homeless Youth.

Best regards,

Karen

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:01:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rocco Vick	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB613 specifically how it will appropriate funds to make the safe spaces for youth Pilot Program permanent within the Office of Youth Services. There are too many homeless youth in Hawaii that need services to help stabilize them despite being houseless for whatever reason. Specifically the LGBTQ+ youth population face higher chances of simply being kicked out of their homes because of unevolved and unsupportive parents. I was recently witness to a case like this here in Kona that was heartbreaking and it is hard to not know where to send these youth in this kind of predicament due to a lack of services. Hawaii has a history of protecting its population and this bill will help do that for these very vulnerable members of our communities.

Mahalo for your time and consideration

Rocco Vick

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:19:19 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Mike Golojuch, Sr.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support HB613. Please pass this bill.

Mike Golojuch, Sr.

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 10:33:11 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joe Wilson	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee Members,

I write in strong support of HB613 HD1 relating to homeless youth and the appropriation of funds to provide emergency shelter and services.

Homelessness among our youth is not just a statistic—it’s a deeply personal and multifaceted crisis that touches the lives of real people in our community. Many of these young individuals find themselves without a safe place to call home due to circumstances beyond their control, such as family conflict, economic hardship, abuse, or neglect.

As director of the Lei Pua ‘Ala Queer Histories of Hawai‘i project, I have seen the ways in which the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ Māhū youth in particular, including hunger, violence, behavioral health, and housing instability, are even far more severe than those faced by their heterosexual peers. The trauma they endure often leaves lasting scars, impacting their mental health and sense of self-worth. Without the stability of a home and the compassion of a caring community, these challenges can feel insurmountable, leading to isolation and vulnerability.

However, there is hope. Early and consistent support can transform lives. By offering understanding, resources, and a safe space for all who are experiencing such challenges, we can help these young people find their footing and build a brighter future.

Any effort to uplift community-based organizations working to end youth homelessness in Hawai‘i is not just appreciated—it is truly needed. Your support can make a real difference, offering a lifeline to those who need it most.

Thank you for considering support for this important bill. Together, we can create a world where every young person feels valued, supported, and safe.

Joe Wilson

Ahupua‘a Kaunala

North Shore O‘ahu

House D47 | Senate D23

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 10:39:58 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and FIN Committee Members,

As a public health profession in Hawai'i, I write in strong support of HB613 HD1, which would appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

The needs of unaccompanied houseless youth in our state is great, but the resources are few, especially keeping mind:

- Hawai'i has the third highest rate of homeless keiki in the U.S.
- There are no services for homeless keiki on our neighbor islands.
- There are no state general funds dedicated to homeless keiki.
- The Homeless Programs office offers no monies for this young population.

Shelter and related supports can make the difference between robust health and irreparable harm for our local keiki and their 'ohana. Please support this bill.

Mahalo,

Thaddeus Pham (he/him)

Makiki, HI

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 11:43:17 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Anthony Makana Paris	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB613

Aloha Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Committee on Finance,

I hope this message finds you well. I am writing to share my wholehearted support for HB613, a bill that seeks to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program permanent, ensuring continued access to safe housing, mental health treatment, and essential support services for vulnerable youth throughout our state.

As someone who was homeless at the age of 15, I can speak personally to the profound challenges faced by young people who find themselves without a home or a guardian to turn to. At that time, I struggled with feelings of fear and uncertainty. The weight of needing to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, and safety while also trying to make sense of my situation was overwhelming. It was a very difficult time in my life.

Thankfully, I was able to receive help from programs offered by Kamehameha Schools, which provided shelter, emotional support, and critical services to help me navigate this challenging time. Without these programs, I honestly don't know where I would be today. The guidance and care I received gave me a chance to rebuild my life and move forward with hope and direction. I am deeply grateful for this support, and I recognize how transformative it was for me. Unfortunately, not every young person facing homelessness has access to such life-changing resources.

This is why I strongly believe it is so important to make the Safe Spaces for Youth Program permanent. It would ensure that other young people in Hawaii who are experiencing homelessness can receive the same type of support that was so critical for me. These programs offer more than just shelter—they provide the tools and opportunities for healing, growth, and ultimately a brighter future.

The statistics regarding youth homelessness are concerning, with one in ten young adults and one in thirty adolescents facing homelessness each year. Many of these youth struggle with mental health issues, substance use, and physical harm, making the need for supportive programs like this even more urgent. LGBTQ+ youth are particularly vulnerable, with many facing physical harm while homeless. These young people deserve our support and compassion.

I humbly ask that you consider the immense difference this bill can make in the lives of vulnerable youth across Hawaii. By making the Safe Spaces for Youth Program permanent, we can ensure that more young people are given the opportunity to heal, succeed, and find safety. It is not just about providing shelter; it is about giving them the chance to rebuild their futures with the proper care and support.

Mahalo for taking the time to consider this important legislation. I sincerely hope you will support HB613 and make a lasting, positive difference in the lives of Hawaii's vulnerable youth.

Me ke aloha,

Anthony Makana Paris

Kapolei, Hawaii

Testimony in Strong Support of Bill Relating to Homeless Youth

Committee on Finance
Hawaii State Legislature
February 24, 2025

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

My name is Dr. Kathleen O'Dell, and I am submitting this testimony in strong support of the bill relating to homeless youth. As a researcher and advocate for vulnerable populations, I have spent much of my career studying youth homelessness, its causes, and the profound impacts it has on young people's lives. The data presented in the bill reflects a deeply concerning crisis, one that requires immediate and sustained attention from our policymakers.

Youth homelessness is an urgent issue that disproportionately affects young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, with at least 10% of this age group experiencing some form of homelessness each year. For adolescents aged 13 to 17, this number is even more alarming, with 1 in 30 young people facing homelessness without a parent or guardian. These numbers highlight a population that is often overlooked and underfunded in terms of resources and support.

The mental health challenges faced by homeless youth are severe and widespread. As noted in the bill, 69% of homeless youth report mental health problems, which is far higher than the general youth population. Many of these young people are also survivors of abuse, neglect, and trauma, making their vulnerability even greater. Providing safe spaces for these youth is critical, not only to address immediate physical needs like food, shelter, and safety, but also to support their mental and emotional well-being. The current pilot program established by Act 130 has shown significant promise, with communities reporting improved housing stability, better educational outcomes, and reductions in risky behaviors among youth who participate in the program. This is why it is crucial to make the program permanent.

The Safe Spaces for Youth program offers an essential lifeline for young people who are in danger of falling through the cracks. The collaboration between multiple state departments and local agencies ensures that homeless youth have access to the comprehensive support they need. From educational opportunities and employment support to behavioral health services, this program provides an integrated response to the complex and multifaceted issue of youth homelessness.

In addition, the bill's provision to allow shelters to admit youth for up to 90 days without parental consent is a necessary step in recognizing that these youth may have been abandoned, neglected, or subjected to abuse. For these young people, immediate intervention can save lives and provide a pathway to a better future.

As a professional in the field of higher education, I urge you to support this bill, which will make a lasting difference in the lives of vulnerable young people in Hawaii. The challenges they face are enormous, but with your leadership, we can provide them with the support they need to build a brighter future.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important matter.

Sincerely,
Kathleen O'Dell, PhD

HB-613-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 9:56:22 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2025 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Shanda Brack	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I am writing to express my strong support for HB613, Safe Spaces for Youth, which would provide emergency shelter and services for unaccompanied homeless youth and make the Safe Spaces for Youth pilot program permanent.

As a primary care nurse practitioner working on Oahu's Leeward side, I have seen firsthand the urgent need for dedicated resources to support vulnerable youth who are experiencing homelessness.

Teen homelessness is a critical issue in our community. Many young people find themselves without stable housing due to family conflicts, economic hardship, abuse, or neglect. Without safe shelter and access to essential services, these youth face severe risks, including exploitation, substance abuse, and mental health struggles. Investing in a homeless teen shelter and youth services program is not only a moral obligation but also a practical investment in the well-being of our community and future generations. Data show that the percentage of teens who identify as LGBTQ+ is very high, sometimes up to 50%.

Evidence from similar programs across the country shows that such initiatives reduce youth homelessness, decrease reliance on public assistance in adulthood, and improve overall life outcomes for participants.

Investing in our youth will give them a chance to be self-sufficient, productive members of our community.

Again, I urge you to support HB613.

Mahalo nui loa,

Shanda Brack, APRN