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**Testimony of the Office of the Public Defender,  
State of Hawai'i to the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness**

February 6, 2025

H.B. 613: RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH.

Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committee:

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

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 are in agreement that we can do better as a community to help and provide supportive and safety services to our youth experiencing homelessness. Our youth need help with basic needs, access to education, 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.

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 4, 2025

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

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: Thursday, February 6, 2025, Time 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this bill, defers to the Office of Youth Services, provides comments, and requests clarification.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the bill is to appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

DHS appreciates the Legislature's commitment to addressing the needs of minors and young adults experiencing homelessness. DHS respectfully requests that the Legislature consider appropriating funds for the Office of Youth Services (OYS) that 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 OYS has submitted an administration measure, HB 1101, to codify 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, and DHS defers to OYS regarding its resource needs.

For the safety of all minors that may access a shelter or support services, DHS Child Welfare Services Branch (CWS) requires that all providers sheltering minors become appropriately licensed by CWS or the Department of Health. Without licensure by either DHS or another licensing agency, there will be no government oversight, and the provider cannot receive contracted government funding through CWS, nor is CWS able to pay the unlicensed provider for shelter services even if a child is involved with CWS. CWS clarifies that it licenses and contracts for shelters for minors through age 17.

DHS recognizes that youth who have run away or are experiencing homelessness are very vulnerable and agrees that available services should never be traumatizing. DHS clarifies that the shelter providers must take necessary steps so that youth can access available services, especially for minors or young adults who may be involved in a CWS case or are eligible to receive educational services through the Department of Education (DOE). This will require the provider to communicate with DHS; it does not mean a child will be automatically removed from the shelter, as DHS prefers that the child be in a safe environment.

In addition to being compliant with the federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act to access those federal funds, the benefits and services vital to youth involved in a CWS include access to health care coverage through Medicaid, higher education payments, other benefits and services available to youth who elect to extend foster care to support their transition into adulthood, as well as education services through DOE.

We respectfully request that any general fund appropriation not reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executive budget.

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



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA

JOHN MIZUNO  
DIRECTOR  
STATEWIDE OFFICE ON HOMELESSNESS & HOUSING SOLUTIONS

Testimony of **John M. Mizuno**  
Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness  
Before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES  
& HOMELESSNESS**  
Thursday, February 6, 2025  
10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 329, State Capitol

In consideration of  
**House Bill No. 613**  
**RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH**

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

My name is John Mizuno. I am the Governor's Coordinator on Homelessness and the Director of the Statewide Office on Homelessness and Housing Solutions (SOHHS).

First, on behalf of my office and Governor Green, I want to thank the House of Representatives for introducing HB613.

I strongly support **House Bill 613**, which appropriates funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth. We agree with the legislature's findings that one in ten young adults between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five and at least one in thirty adolescents between the ages of thirteen and seventeen experience some form of homelessness in which the young adult or adolescent is unaccompanied by a parent or guardian over the course of a year.

We also agree with the legislature's findings in **HB 613** that among homeless youth, sixty-nine percent report mental health problems; thirty-three percent have once been part of the foster care system; and fifty percent have been in the juvenile justice system, in jail or detention. We further agree that sixty-two percent of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+) youth report being physically harmed while experiencing homelessness, while forty-seven percent of non-LGBTQ+ youth reported being physically abused while homeless and that runaway and homeless youth are vulnerable to multiple threats, including having unmet basic food and shelter needs, untreated mental health disorders, substance use, significant disruption to their education, sexually transmitted diseases and human immunodeficiency virus infection, sexual exploitation, physical victimization, and suicide. We

John M. Mizuno Testimony on HB613  
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness  
February 6, 2025  
Page 2

also agree with the legislature's recognition that existing resources for outreach and shelter options are limited as unaccompanied homeless youth tend to be an underserved and neglected population.

The Governor, the First Lady, and the Statewide Office of Homelessness and Housing Solutions are fully committed to partnering with the Hawai'i State Legislature to address the issue of homeless youth. We are actively working on youth kauhale as part of our state-wide kauhale initiative.

Thank you, Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Committee Members, for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of House Bill 613. I am deeply grateful for your consideration of this important measure and its potential positive impact on providing emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth throughout all the islands in the State of Hawai'i. We appreciate the legislature's continued commitment to helping those facing housing instability, especially our homeless youth.

Mahalo!

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 5, 2025

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

FROM: Leanne Gillespie, Executive Director

SUBJECT: HB 613 – RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH  
Hearing: February 6, 2025, 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

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

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

The Department of Human Services, Office of Youth Services continue to work to increase and improve existing programs that provide shelter to unaccompanied homeless youth. Act 130 (SLH 2022) Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program requires the Office of Youth Services to open Safe Space youth homeless shelters in each county. This program is due to sunset 6/30/2025. Current House Bill 1101 Relating to Safe Spaces for Youth Program seeks to make this program permanent within the Office of Youth Services.

AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AGENCY

During the pilot project period, 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. Due to the time and effort dedicated to this program, OYS respectfully requests the support of HB1101 to make permanent within the OYS and appropriate funds.

Estimated funding needed to fully implement Safe Spaces statewide:

<b>Safe Spaces Program Activity</b>	<b>Annual Estimated Cost</b>
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 \$7,017,016 effective FY27 to expand the program statewide. In lieu of full funding beginning FY27, the OYS respectfully requests to continue FY25 project funding of \$871,016 and 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.

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.



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

January 31, 2025

House's Committee on Human Services & Homelessness  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Thursday, February 6, 2025 at 10:00 AM

**RE: STRONG SUPPORT for House Bill 613**

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice-Chair Olds 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, which appropriates funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services for unaccompanied homeless youth. This critical measure is necessary to address the urgent needs of young people experiencing homelessness and to break the cycle that too often leads them into chronic homelessness as adults.

Unaccompanied homeless youth are among the most vulnerable members of our community. Many are forced onto the streets for a variety of reason from family rejection due to the keiki's sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression, or pregnancy status; to escape physical, sexual, and/or mental abuse; poverty; or aging out of foster care. Without access to stable shelter and essential support services, these young individuals face immense challenges, including exposure to violence, exploitation, survival sex-work, and long-term mental and physical health risks.

Studies show that without intervention, homeless youth are significantly more likely to become homeless adults. By investing in emergency shelters and services now, we have the opportunity to provide critical interventions that can change the trajectory of their lives. Early support, including safe housing, counseling, job training, and educational assistance, can help these young people build stable, independent futures and reduce overall homelessness in our state.

Hawai'i has a responsibility to protect and uplift all of its residents, especially those who are most vulnerable. HB 613 is a necessary step in ensuring that unaccompanied homeless youth receive the support they need before their situation worsens. By passing this bill, we demonstrate our commitment to breaking the cycle of homelessness and creating a future where all young people have a chance to thrive.

Mahalo for your time and consideration. We urge the Committee to pass HB 613 and take a crucial step toward addressing youth homelessness in Hawai'i.

In solidarity,

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



## TESTIMONY FROM THE STONEWALL CAUCUS OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF HAWAII

### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

FEBRUARY 1, 2025

#### Testimony in Strong Support of House Bill [613] RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and esteemed Members of the Committee:

My name is Abby Simmons, Chair of the Stonewall Caucus of the Democratic Party of Hawaii, and I am testifying on behalf of our Caucus in strong support of HB613, which seeks to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth across the State of Hawaii.

#### Why This Bill is Critical

Hawaii's youth homelessness crisis is a growing concern. Research indicates that 1 in 10 young adults (ages 18-25) and 1 in 30 adolescents (ages 13-17) experience some form of homelessness annually without the support of a parent or guardian. These young individuals are among the most vulnerable in our state, facing challenges such as:

- Lack of basic necessities (food, safe shelter, medical care)
- Higher rates of mental health struggles (69% report mental health challenges)
- A history of state involvement (33% have been in foster care, 50% have been in the juvenile justice system)
- Disproportionate risks for LGBTQ+ youth (62% report physical harm while homeless)

Without intervention, these youth are at heightened risk for exploitation, trafficking, untreated illness, substance abuse, and even suicide.

### **How HB613 Provides a Solution**

By appropriating funds to the Department of Human Services (DHS), HB613 ensures that emergency shelters and essential services will be provided on all major Hawaiian islands—Hawai'i, Kauai, Lanai, Maui, Molokai, and Oahu. This measure will:

1. Expand Safe Housing Options – Youth who have nowhere else to turn will have access to stable, short-term emergency shelters.
2. Improve Access to Supportive Services – Mental health care, substance abuse treatment, case management, and job training will help youth transition out of homelessness.
3. Prevent Further Harm – Providing structured support prevents young people from falling into dangerous situations, such as trafficking or crime.

### **A Moral and Economic Imperative**

Investing in youth now prevents long-term societal costs, such as emergency medical expenses, law enforcement interventions, and chronic homelessness in adulthood. Studies show that for every \$1 spent on homeless prevention services, communities save \$3 to \$6 in future costs. HB613 is both the right and smart thing to do.

Every child deserves a safe place to sleep and a chance at a better future. By passing HB613, we take a vital step toward protecting Hawaii's unaccompanied homeless youth and providing them with the support they need to thrive.

I urge you to pass HB613 and ensure that no child in our state is left without shelter or hope.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Abby Simmons (she/her)  
Chair & SCC Representative  
Stonewall Caucus  
Democratic Party of Hawai'i  
<https://linktr.ee/stonewalldph>



**HB613 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:**

*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.



## **Advocating for the Hawai'i LGBTQIA+ Community**

February 3, 2025

House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness  
Hawai'i State Capitol  
415 South Beretania Street, Room 329  
Honolulu, HI 96813

Hearing: Thursday, February 6, 2025, at 10:00 AM

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

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and committee members,

I am writing in strong support of House Bill 613 on behalf of the Hawai'i State Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer Plus. (LGBTQ+) Commission, which was established by the 2022 Hawai'i State Legislature with the following purpose:

“...to improve the State's interface with members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus community; identify the short- 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.”

HB 613, provides funding to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

### **Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

A significant gap exists in our safety network and service delivery system for unaccompanied unhoused keiki 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 keiki.

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.

Older teenagers (18-19 years old) may be eligible for emergency shelters such as The Institute for Human Services (IHS), but these facilities are not designed to meet their needs, leaving them vulnerable to victimization by older, more experienced individuals on the streets. Residential Youth Services and Empowerment (RYSE), operating on O'ahu's Windward side, is

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

the only emergency shelter in the state serving youth ages 18-24, and it has been at capacity since they began operations in 2018. No overnight emergency shelters exist for youth under 18.

### 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. 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 underrepresent 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.

### Urgency for Legislative Action

For these reasons, the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission strongly urges your support for HB 613. By funding this initiative, the Department of Human Services can collaborate with community partners to provide desperately needed shelter space and leverage additional federal resources to address youth homelessness in our state.

Should you or any member of your staff have any questions regarding this testimony you can reach the Hawai'i State LGBTQ+ Commission at [hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com](mailto:hawaiistatelgbtqpluscommission@gmail.com).

Mahalo nui loa for your time and consideration,

Rick Velasquez, LCSW (he/him)

Commissioner

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



## TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB613, RELATING TO HOMELESS YOUTH

HOUSE COMMITTEES ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS  
February 6, 2025

Aloha Chair Marten and Vice Chair Olds and Members of the House Human Services & Homelessness 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](mailto:legislation@hawaiidemocrats.org).



**Residential Youth Services & Empowerment**

**COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS**

Rep. Lisa Marten, Chair

Rep. Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair

Rep. Terez Amato

Rep. Cory M. Chun

Rep. Sue L. Keohokapu-Lee Loy

Rep. Gregg Takayama

Rep. Jenna Takenouchi

Rep. David Alcos III

Rep. Diamond Garcia

DATE: Thursday, February 6, 2025

TIME: 10:00am

PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Conference Room 329

State Capitol

415 South Beretania Street

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and members of the Committee:

We are in **support** of HB613 relating to homeless youth and the appropriation of funds to provide emergency shelter and services.

Homelessness among youth and young adults is a multifaceted issue, often stemming from family conflict, economic instability, abuse, or neglect. The trauma associated with these experiences can lead to profound mental health challenges. Without the stability of a home and the support of a caring community, these mental health issues can become overwhelming, leaving our young people vulnerable and isolated. Early and consistent interventions can significantly improve outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness.

Any effort to support community-based organizations working to end youth homelessness in Hawaii is appreciated.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony.

With aloha,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Carla Houser!".

Carla Houser

Executive Director



February 6, 2024

## O'ahu Youth Action Board

Est. 2017

**Co-Chair**

Efren Berrones

**Co-Chair**

Jean Grey

**Vice Chair**

Kahekili "Kai" Alip

**Treasurer**

Dawson Pahia-Kuloloia

**Social Coordinator**

Laleiyana "Lala" Caton

**Communications Coordinator**

Kyle-Ann Bobo

### **TESTIMONY IN STRONG SUPPORT OF HB 613 Relating to Homeless Youth**

TO: House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

FROM: Efren Berrones- Co-Chair of O'ahu Youth Action Board, Partners In Care (PIC)

Hearing: Thursday, February 6th, 10:00 AM

Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **strong support of HB 613, Relating to Homeless Youth.**

My name is Efren Berrones, and I serve as the Co-Chair of the O'ahu Youth Action Board (OYAB). OYAB is a designated board composed of youth with lived experience of homelessness on O'ahu, advocating for policy changes that directly impact houseless young people. We firmly believe that any decisions affecting us must include our voices, perspectives, and lived experiences.

**HB 613 is a critical measure that would appropriate funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.** According to the **2023 Homeless Assessment Report** from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, **Hawai'i has the third-highest rate of youth homelessness in the country.** This statistic is more than a number—it represents real young people in our communities who are struggling to survive without safe housing, access to education, or reliable support systems.

Without stable housing, homeless youth are at significantly higher risk of exploitation, trafficking, substance use, and involvement in the criminal legal system. They are also more likely to experience long-term homelessness as adults if they do not receive support early. Intervening now is not only a moral responsibility—it is a cost-effective strategy. Studies have shown that every dollar invested in youth housing and services saves taxpayers money by reducing the long-term costs associated with emergency healthcare, law enforcement involvement, and chronic homelessness.

Currently, nearly all youth homelessness services in Hawai'i are located on O'ahu. This means that homeless youth on the outer

islands—who already face a severe lack of housing options—must leave their home islands, support systems, and communities just to access basic shelter and services. Many are forced to **fly to O‘ahu alone, without resources or connections, further isolating them** at an already vulnerable time in their lives. **This is unacceptable.** No young person should have to choose between staying in their community or accessing life-saving support.

Organizations like **Residential Youth Services & Empowerment (RYSE), Hawai‘i Health and Harm Reduction Center, and Hale Kipa** have built an effective network of youth-serving programs, providing essential services with limited financial support from the state. These organizations are doing everything they can to ensure young people in Hawai‘i have a chance at a stable future, but **they cannot continue this work without dedicated funding.** Given the uncertainty of federal funding under the new administration, it is imperative that the state take action to fill this gap.

By passing **HB 613**, the Legislature has an opportunity to make a real difference in the lives of Hawai‘i’s youth. Investing in shelter and services today means giving young people the chance to succeed, break cycles of homelessness, and contribute meaningfully to our communities.

I urge you to **pass HB 613** and make the necessary investment to protect and support our keiki—**on every island.**

With Aloha,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Efren Berrones". The script is cursive and elegant.

**Efren Berrones**

Co-Chair, O‘ahu Youth Action Board

[efrenb@partnersincareoahu.org](mailto:efrenb@partnersincareoahu.org)





# Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

# KAWAIILOA

February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2025

House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness  
Hearing Time: 10:00 AM  
Location: State Capitol Conference Room 329  
Re: HB613, Relating to Homeless Youth

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 **support of HB613 Relating to Homeless Youth**. This bill appropriates funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

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.**



## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 613

**TO:** Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, & HSH Committee Members

**FROM:** Nikos Leverenz  
Policy & Advancement Manager

**DATE:** February 6, 2025 (10:00 AM)

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Hawai'i Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHC) **strongly supports** HB 613, which appropriates funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

HHHC 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.

HHHC 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 only 6% of cisgender youth.

HHHC'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](mailto: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: Senator Lisa Mareten, Chair  
And members of the Committee on Human Services and  
Homelessness

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

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, 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.

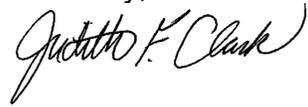
Young people run from abusive or neglectful families. They often have untreated mental health or substance abuse issues. And sometimes they are thrown out of their homes by the adults who are supposed to care for and protect them. Living on the street is difficult and dangerous and young people do not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

Through a HUD-funded, Youth Homelessness System Improvement grant, HYSN is working with government and nonprofit organizations as well as young people with lived experience of homelessness to identify unmet needs and build stronger partnerships to address them. We are working with the University of Hawaii to conduct a statewide street youth survey and interviews/focus groups. That data will help to ensure that funds will be used effectively and efficiently.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Judith F. Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J".

Judith F. Clark, MPH  
Executive Director

**HB-613**

Submitted on: 2/2/2025 11:38:46 AM

Testimony for HSH on 2/6/2025 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Philip Steinbacher	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

As the Kaua'i representative to the Hawai'i LGBTQ+ Advisory Commission, I am writing in strong support of House Bill 613. The legislature has determined that closte to 4% of Hawai'i youth ages 13-17 experience some form of unaccompanied homelessness. Researchers estimate that 20-40% of homeless youth identify as LGBTQ+. Sixty-two percent of the LGBTQ+ homeless youth in Hawai'i report being physically harmed. It is imperative that we provide support for their food, shelter, educational, and mental health needs, as well as offer protection from substance use, sexually-transmitted infections, sexual exploitation, and physical harm. I urge this committee to support this critical legislation. All our youth deserve care and aloha.

**HB-613**

Submitted on: 2/3/2025 8:25:10 AM

Testimony for HSH on 2/6/2025 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
cheryl burghardt	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I SUPPORT HB 613 which appropriates funds to the Department of Human Services to provide emergency shelter and services to unaccompanied homeless youth. From my experience, the support and help that youth receive initially can determine the fate of their next paths. It is important for us to have this service and appropriate the funds for it.

I SUPPORT

C. Burghardt

Kou, Oahu

**HB-613**

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 6:29:51 AM

Testimony for HSH on 2/6/2025 10:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Thaddeus Pham	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and HSH Committee Members,

As a public health profession in Hawai'i, I write in strong support of HB613, 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