

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of H.B. 880 H.D. 2  
RELATING TO EARLY CHILD INTERVENTION**

REPRESENTATIVE KYLE T. YAMASHITA, CHAIR  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Hearing Date, Time and Room Number: 02/24/2025, 12:00 PM, CR 308

1 **Fiscal Implications:** The proposed measure appropriates funds to the Department of Health  
2 ("Department") to establish 2.0 FTE mental health specialist positions. The Department requests  
3 that this measure be considered as a vehicle to provide this needed funding so long as it does not  
4 supplant the priorities and requests outlined in the Governor's executive budget request.

5 **Department Position:** The Department supports this measure and offers comments.

6 **Department Testimony:** The Family Health Services Division (FHSD) provides the following  
7 testimony on behalf of the Department.

8 The DOH Early Intervention Section (EIS) provides services as mandated by Part C of the Individuals  
9 with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for children from birth to age 3 years with developmental  
10 delays or who have a health condition with a risk for developmental delay.

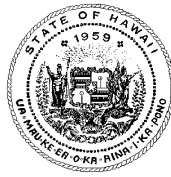
11 Establishing the 2.0 FTE general funded mental health specialist positions will allow maximum  
12 reimbursements to the state through Medicaid for services to infants and toddlers with special  
13 needs and their families.

14 **Offered Amendment:** None.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.

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

**SYLVIA LUKE**  
LT. GOVERNOR  
KA HOPE KIA'ĀINA



**BRENN H. HASHIMOTO**  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

**BRIAN K. FURUTO**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

**STATE OF HAWAII | KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII**  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**  
**KA 'OIHANA HO'OMŌHALA LIMAHANA**  
235 S. BERETANIA STREET  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813-2437

Statement of  
**BRENN H. HASHIMOTO**  
Director, Department of Human Resources Development

Before the  
**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE**  
Monday, February 24, 2025  
12:00 PM  
State Capitol, Conference Room 308

In consideration of  
**HB880, HD2 Relating to Early Child Intervention**

Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and the members of the committee.

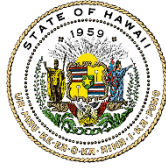
The Department of Human Resources Development (HRD) offers the following comments for HB880 HD2.

The purpose of HB880 HD2 is to appropriate funds for the reclassification of certain positions and the establishment of mental health specialist positions within the Early Child Services Unit of the Department of Health Early Intervention Section.

HRD appreciates the Committee on Labor's amendments to HD1 which removed language that would require HRD to reclassify certain positions within the Early Childhood Services unit of the Department of Health Early Intervention Section.

To ensure clarity and consistency with the removal of Section 2 from HD1, we respectfully request that the language, "appropriate funds for the reclassification of certain positions," from Page 2, Lines 1-2, and "provided that the salary schedule for each position shall be set at a mental health specialist salary schedule," from Page 2, Lines 13-15, be removed. This language is unnecessary given our existing policies and procedures related to the establishment of a civil service position.

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



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**Executive Office on Early Learning**

Ke'ena Ho'okele Ho'ona'auao Pae Kamali'i o Hawai'i Moku'aina  
2759 South King Street, Room C6  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

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

FROM: Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director  
Executive Office on Early Learning

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 880, H.D. 2 – RELATING TO EARLY CHILD INTERVENTION

Committee: FIN  
Date: Monday, February 24, 2025  
Time: 12:00 p.m.  
Location: Conference Room 308

Executive Office on Early Learning's Position: **SUPPORT**

The Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) offers the following comments in support of H.B. No. 880, H.D. 2, and defers to the Department of Health regarding implementation and funding.

The Department of Health's Early Intervention Section (EIS) plays a vital role in Hawai'i's early learning system by identifying and addressing developmental delays in young children. The EOEL supports efforts to strengthen the department's ability to recruit and retain highly trained specialists. These specialists provide critical early support for our keiki and help them reach their full potential during their most formative years.

We appreciate the Legislature's continued investment in our youngest keiki and their families and thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of H.B. No. 880, H.D.2.

## HAWAII EARLY INTERVENTION COORDINATING COUNCIL (HEICC)



Date: February 24th, 2025

To: Committee on Finance  
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
and Committee Members

From: Hawai`i Early Intervention Coordination Council (HEICC)

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 Early Child Intervention**

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**The Early Intervention Section (EIS)** is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about how to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawaii. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawaii meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

The Hawai`i Early Intervention Coordination Council (HEICC) **strongly supports HB880**. We are requesting two full-time FTE mental health specialist positions to a) address the social and emotional needs of our birth to three keiki with significant support needs and b) provide specialists to support our early interventionists to increase retention. Of all development domains, social and emotional development is the area where our keiki continue to struggle the most. In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and `ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to both staff recruitment and staff retention. With a 30%-42% vacancy rate, we believe this will be a helpful workforce development strategy.

Having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering mandated EI services both statewide and within state operated EI programs. If the State cannot provide the mandated services, it risks lawsuits. HEICC would like to avoid an IDEA lawsuit, like the 2018 DOE's Special Education lawsuit, which cost the State 10.5M in preventative dollars.

Historically, EIS has not received any state complaints. However, the first complaint was received in FFY2023, followed by four complaints in FFY2024. All complaints, except for one, were primarily due to the child not receiving EI services in accordance with the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that resulted in a finding of noncompliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Mahalo, on behalf of the Hawai`i Early Intervention Coordinating council (HEICC) for your continued support to improve the health, safety and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their `ohana. We appreciate you supporting **HB880**.

Aloha nui,

*Kerrie Urosevich*

Kerrie Urosevich, PhD

Chair, Hawai`i Early Intervention Coordinating Council



Date: February 11, 2025

To: Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health, dba AIMH HI

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 Early Child Intervention**

**The Early Intervention Section (EIS)** is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about and ability to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawai'i. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawai'i meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

The first 1,000 days after birth are critical in establishing brain connections, relationship patterns, and laying the foundation for future development. **AIMH HI** stands on the vision that "infant mental health is everyone's kuleana" – and the Early Intervention Section is key in addressing the mental and early relational health of our youngest. Our association's role in the early childhood space is to "hold the hands of those who hold the hands of babies" – knowing that when the providers around young children are steady, the children can then have steady growth and development.

This bill allows the department to establish mental health specialist positions to integrate early childhood mental health into its programs. Infant Mental Health Specialists provide targeted supports, understanding the delicate need to support the relationships around the child. **The addition of mental health specialists is an innovative approach to tackling mental health as early as possible and triaging resources in a more efficient way, alleviating the need to elevate children to more intensive services.** In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and 'ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to staff retention. Mahalo for your commitment and support to improve the mental health, safety, and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their 'ohana.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E©

Executive Director, Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i



### Our Mission

Increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



### Steering Committee

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Justina Acevedo-Cross  
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Jordana Ferreira  
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Sulma Gandhi  
Kahi Moreman  
Angela Thomas



### Contact Info

700 Bishop Street, Suite 1701  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 93813

info@committokeiki.org  
CommitToKeiki.org

Date: February 24, 2025

To: Representative Kyle Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
Members of the House Committee on Finance

From: Commit to Keiki

RE: House Bill 880 HD2, Relating to Early Child Intervention

Commit to Keiki is a statewide, non-partisan, public-private collaborative to ensure a brighter start for Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, Commit to Keiki's mission is to increase Hawai'i's investments in its youngest keiki by collaborating with elected officials and serving as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to early childhood.

**Commit to Keiki supports passage of House Bill 880 HD2**, requires the Department of Human Resources Development to reclassify certain early intervention specialist positions within the Early Childhood Services Unit in the Department of Health.

Commit to Keiki believes strongly that we—as a community—must support all of our keiki and strive to meet each of their developmental and educational needs. The motivations for doing so are myriad but—more than anything—meeting their needs early in their lives pays dividends for the individual children as well as our community.

As noted in the measure's preamble, there is currently a vacancy rate between thirty and forty-two percent across all early intervention programs across the state. Not only does this limit our ability to address the needs of our state's keiki, but it also puts us at significant risk of legal action.

Should this measure be passed, it would inject a significant amount of funding into programs that provide keiki with access to professionals in fields including special education, occupational and physical therapy. It would also provide funding to support mental health specialists who would integrate early childhood mental health into their programs. This has been shown to positively impact the children they work and have a marked effect on overall staff retention.

**For these reasons, CTK strongly supports House Bill 880 HD2.**

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

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Date: February 22nd, 2025

To: Committee on Finance  
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair  
AND Committee Members

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Strong Support of Early Intervention Section (EIS) **HB880 HD2 Early Child Intervention**

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**The Early Intervention Section (EIS)** is a federal and state-mandated program that provides services to support the development of infant and toddlers from birth to three years of age. Information and support are also provided to parents to increase their knowledge about and ability to support their child's development. The Department of Health (DOH) is the lead agency for the implementation of Part C, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for the State of Hawaii. Within the DOH, EIS is responsible to ensure that Hawaii meets all the requirements and regulations of Part C of IDEA.

**ECAS strongly supports** parity among the State's Early Intervention workforce **through HB880 HD2**. A couple of years ago, Early Intervention Section contracted with the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education to conduct a Comparative Rate and Salary Study with comparable states. **Out of the eight comparable states, Hawai'i ranked last or in the bottom three** in EI program administration salaries (e.g., Program Manager, Data Clerk, and Office Assistant) and direct service reimbursement rates for required positions such as Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Speech Therapy, Care Coordinators, Special Education Teachers, General Education teachers.) The Legislature gratefully approved an increase for *contracted programs* in 2024. This year, we are requesting increases for our State programs to address the 30%-42% vacancy rates.

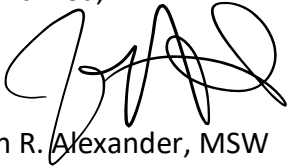
The department of human resources development will establish two mental health specialist positions to integrate early childhood mental health into its programs. In addition to meeting the needs of the keiki and `ohana they serve, mental health specialists have proven to contribute to staff retention.

Recruiting and retaining qualified staff is critical for delivering quality services and ensuring our youngest keiki with disabilities receive the support needed to help them reach their developmental goals. Additionally, having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering mandated EI services both statewide and within state operated EI programs. If the State cannot provide the mandated services, it risks the following lawsuits. ECAS would like to avoid an IDEA lawsuit similar to DOE's Special Education law suit few years back, costing the State 10.5M in preventative dollars.

Historically, EIS has not received any state complaints. However, the first complaint was received in FFY2023, followed by four complaints in FFY2024. All complaints, except for one, was primarily due to the child not receiving EI services in accordance with the Individualized Family Support Plan (IFSP) that resulted in a finding of noncompliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Mahalo for your continued support to improve the health, safety and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their `ohana. We appreciate you supporting **HB880 HD2**.

Mahalo Nui Loa,



Jonathan R. Alexander, MSW

Hawaii Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Coordinator (CSPD), ECAS





To: House Committee on Finance  
Re: HB 880 HD2 Relating to Early Child Intervention

Hawai'i State Capitol, Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference  
Monday February 24, 2025

Dear Chair Yamashita, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Committee Members,

**On behalf of HCANSpeaks!, I am writing in support of HB 880 HD2, relating to early child intervention.** This bill requires the Department of Human Resources Development to reclassify certain early intervention specialist positions within the Early Childhood Services Unit in the Department of Health.

The bill proposes funding to reclassify state provider positions (Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapist, and Special Education Teachers) from a level III to a level IV salary schedule to have pay parity with state Speech Pathologists who are currently at a level IV salary schedule. The bill also proposes to establish two mental health specialist positions to support infant mental health within the Early Childhood Unit, Department of Health, Early Intervention Section. In light of severe workforce shortages, pay parity and more mental health specialist positions are desperately needed to help meet the needs of our keiki.

**Hawai'i has faced a critical shortage of professionals who can meet the mental health needs of our keiki, making it harder for families to access timely, quality care. It is not uncommon for families to experience year-long waitlists and delays accessing essential mental health care, services, and support.** The bill takes important steps towards addressing this workforce shortage by addressing staffing gaps that directly impact the development of infants and toddlers who rely on these critical services.

Fair compensation is essential for attracting and training highly skilled providers, including Occupational Therapists, Physical Therapists, Special Education Teachers, and Speech Pathologists. Without pay parity, we risk losing these essential professionals to other states, private practice, or other sectors, which further deepens the long-standing workforce gap. By investing in fair compensation, we can build a sustainable workforce that ensures our keiki receive the mental health support they need to thrive during their most crucial years of growth and development.

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 880 HD2.

Kind regards,  
Noreen Kohl, Ph.D.  
Policy Researcher and Advocate

**HB-880-HD-2**

Submitted on: 2/21/2025 3:34:54 PM

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

| Submitted By      | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|-------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Christina Simmons | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

TO: Representative Jackson D. Sayama, Chair, Representative Mike Lee, Vice Chair

House Committee on Finance

FROM: Christina Simmons, Kaneohe Resident.

SUBJECT: Testimony on H.B. No. 880, H.D. 1 – RELATING TO EARLY CHILD  
INTERVENTION Committee: FIN Location: Conference Room 309

Thank you for this opportunity to **SUPPORT** this important bill.

The Department of Health's Early Intervention Section (EIS) plays a vital role in Hawai'i's early learning system by identifying and addressing developmental delays in young children, including child and family mental health issues. It is imperative they increase the staffing and skills to best match the needs of complex families they serve. Adding mental health specialists will also go far to support the established staff with supportive supervision. I appreciate the Legislature's continued investment in our youngest keiki and their families and thank you for the opportunity to share these comments in support of H.B. No. 880, H.D.1.

**HB-880-HD-2**

Submitted on: 2/23/2025 1:03:26 PM

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

| Submitted By     | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify                |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Leilani Kailiawa | Individual   | Support            | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Representative Yamashita and Takenouchi and Committe Members

I have in strong support of Early Intervention Section HB880 HD2 Early Child Intervention. I am from Hawai'i Island. . I am a parent of 3 children ages 8, 20 and 22. My youngest child spend 7 months in Neonatal Intestive Care Unit, at Kapiolani Medical Center for Women and Children. He has a complex medical history. My son, Jeremiah went through Early Intervention Services Program, which was beneficial for our family. One thing we struggled a lot was our mentally capacity to keep going and taking care of child with developmental and medical challenges. Can you imagine what my son was going through having to deal with feeding challenges and learning challenges, it was definitely mentally challenging for him. If there were mental health services to help our family, our quality of life would have improved. REcruiting and retaining qualified staff is critical for delivering quality services and ensuring our yuoungest keiki with disabilities receive the support needed to help them reach their developmental goals. Additionally, having the needed service providers and support staff within the DOH EIS infrastructure is critical to delivering mandated EI services both statewide and within state operated EI programs.

Mahalo for your contintued support to improve the health, safety and well-being of our youngest keiki with significant support needs and their ohana. We apprecite you supporting HB880 HD2

With grattitude

Leilani K

## Testimony in Strong Support of HB880 HD2 - Early Childhood Intervention

To: Committee on Finance  
Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
Representative Jenna Takeouchi, Vice Chair  
AND Committee Members

From: Kathleen O'Dell, PhD  
Re: Strong Support of Early Childhood Intervention Section (EIS) HB880 HD2

I am writing in strong support of HB880 HD2, which seeks to address critical workforce and service delivery issues within Hawai'i's Early Intervention Section (EIS). The EIS is a vital program that provides essential services to infants and toddlers, from birth to three years old, to support their development. As a federal and state-mandated program under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it is imperative that Hawai'i meets its obligations to provide quality services for young children with disabilities and developmental delays.

The Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) strongly supports HB880 HD2, as it aims to establish greater parity within Hawai'i's Early Intervention workforce. A study conducted by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education highlighted that Hawai'i ranks at the bottom for salaries and reimbursement rates for early intervention service providers, including physical therapists, special education teachers, occupational therapists, and care coordinators. This salary gap has led to concerning vacancy rates of 30%-42% in some positions, which threatens the quality and availability of services to families in need.

HB880 HD2 addresses this issue by proposing critical reclassifications and pay increases for essential positions, including:

- **Reclassification of Physical Therapists, Occupational Therapists, and Special Education Teachers:** The bill supports moving qualified staff from a Level III to Level IV, reflecting the advanced educational requirements (such as doctorate degrees for physical and occupational therapists) and the high level of responsibilities these professionals hold in the early intervention field.
- **Establishment of Mental Health Specialist Positions:** This provision will integrate early childhood mental health support into the program, ensuring that families receive the holistic care they need while also contributing to staff retention by addressing the mental health needs of both children and providers.

The recruitment and retention of qualified staff are critical for delivering high-quality services to Hawai'i's youngest keiki. Without the necessary workforce, there is a risk that the State may fail to meet its legal obligations under IDEA, which could lead to lawsuits, similar to the one faced by the Department of Education regarding special education services. Such a lawsuit cost the state \$10.5 million in preventative measures. By passing HB880 HD1, we can ensure Hawai'i

does not face these costly repercussions and continues to deliver the mandated services to all children who need them.

Additionally, with increasing complaints regarding the noncompliance of individualized family support plans (IFSPs), it is clear that action is needed to ensure that children and families receive timely and appropriate services. This bill will help to address the root causes of these complaints by stabilizing and supporting the workforce responsible for delivering critical early intervention services.

I urge the committee to support HB880 HD2 and take this important step toward strengthening Hawai'i's early intervention services for our youngest children and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.

Kathleen O'Dell, PhD