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STATE OF HAWAII
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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
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TRISTA SPEER
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February 3, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 1399 – RELATING TO A FAMILY RESILIENCE PILOT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 5, 2025, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this administration measure from the Office of Wellness & Resilience and provides comments.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the bill is to establish and appropriate funds for a five-year Family Resilience Pilot Program within the Office of Wellness and Resilience.

This measure provides an opportunity to address a protective factor¹ in the prevention of child abuse and neglect by meeting the concrete needs of children and families and reducing the risk of entering the child welfare system. There is clear evidence that unconditional asset transfers, such as the 2021 Child Tax Credits, resulted in a significant reduction in reports of child abuse and neglect. Other studies² show that emergency room visits for children went down after families received additional income support.

¹ For more on the Strengthening Families Protective Factors Framework, see, <https://cssp.org/our-work/projects/protective-factors-framework/>.

² See, Association of Expanded Child Tax Credit Payments With Child Abuse and Neglect Emergency Department Visits, at <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9936349/#:~:text=Question,and%20neglect%2Drelated%20ED%20visits.>

This pilot program by OWR will be in addition to the diversion services currently offered by the DHS Child Welfare Services Branch, which provide families at risk of child abuse or neglect with supportive services to assist families with skills and knowledge to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children.

DHS CWSB has also implemented Family First Hawaii (FFH), in accordance with the Family First Prevention Act (FFPSA), to broaden the scope of evidenced-based child abuse and neglect prevention services. Rigorous evaluation of the proposed family resilience pilot project may help the intervention on its way to becoming an evidence-based practice recognized by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, to be eligible for federal reimbursement under FFPSA.

As Hawaii's cost of living remains high and will likely increase as the impacts of federal tariffs increase the prices of consumer goods, DHS recognizes that this pilot program is a timely investment to increase support services and resources to build the resiliency of Hawaii's families with children.

DHS will continue to work with OWR in its development and implementation of the pilot program to ensure that the public benefits participants receive are not reduced by the pilot programs' benefits or services. DHS will also continue dialogue with OWR regarding opportunities to support peer navigators.

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



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**Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 1399
RELATING TO FAMILY RESILIENCE PILOT PROGRAM**

Senator San Buenaventura, Chair
Senator Aquino, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

February 5th, 2025, at 1:00 p.m. Room Number: 225

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** S.B. 1399 which proposes the establishment of a family resilience pilot program. This bill presents an important opportunity to assist families at risk of child welfare involvement by providing them concrete supports, peer supports, connection to cultural programming, parental skill-building and training in protective factors that help to prevent child abuse and neglect.

In the Report submitted to the 2025 Hawai'i State Legislature, the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group addresses the cascading impact of poverty and the need for concrete supports to prevent child welfare service involvement. Throughout the Working Group meetings and in community conversations, youth and families with lived expertise navigating the child welfare system shared that most families who come to the attention of the current system need support services rather than protective intervention.

A core component of S.B. 1399 is the inclusion of trained, trauma-informed peer support navigators with lived experience. These navigators are uniquely positioned to help families connect with community-based services and supports. Peer support programs are particularly valuable because they provide families with access to navigators who understand their struggles firsthand. For children, parents, and caregivers, turning to someone from their own community who has shared similar experiences fosters trust and bridges the gap between families and the services they need, increasing the likelihood that families will follow through on available interventions.

Peer support services have proven to be an effective, evidence-based practice. Since 2007, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) has recognized peer support services as a reimbursable practice, and many states have successfully incorporated them into their Medicaid plans. While research on peer supports within the child welfare system is still emerging, early findings are promising and suggest that peer support can improve outcomes for families, reduce stress, and enhance overall family functioning.

S.B. 1399 also emphasizes the critical need for immediate financial assistance and essential

resources such as food, clothing, housing, childcare, and transportation. These provisions are key to stabilizing families in crisis. Addressing basic needs reduces the stressors that often lead to interactions with the child welfare system, enabling parents and caregivers to focus on strengthening their relationships with their children. The program's holistic approach helps families meet both their immediate needs and long-term goals, empowering them to navigate challenges and work toward healthier, more stable futures.

S.B. 1399 provides a meaningful opportunity to focus on prevention, early intervention, and comprehensive support for families. By investing in prevention services with a trauma-informed approach, the bill provides additional unique elements that were specifically requested from the Malama 'Ohana recommendations report (i.e. peer support navigators and concrete financial supports).

We respectfully urge the committee to pass S.B. 1399 and thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important bill.

Tia L.R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience
Office of the Governor



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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 Joy San Bueanventura, Chair
And members of the Committee on Health and Human
Services

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1399 RELATING TO FAMILY
RESILIENCE PILOT PROGRAM**

Hawaii Youth Services Network (HYSN), a statewide coalition of youth-serving organizations, supports SB 1399 Relating to Family Resilience Pilot Program.

I serve as a member of the Hawaii Trauma-Informed Care Task Force. Over the past 3 years, the task force has developed a plan and strategies that will incorporate trauma-informed approaches to services provided to children, youth, and families.

This Family Resilience Pilot Program will utilize peer navigators, an evidence-informed practice, to help families identify needs and access services. It will provide material assistance to support basic needs. By strengthening families, it will reduce the overload of the Child Welfare System.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH
Executive Director

February 4, 2025

To: Chair San Buenaventura, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Laurie Arial Tochiki, Co-Chair Mālama 'Ohana Working Group

Re: Testimony in support of SB1399

I strongly support SB1399 Relating to a Family Resilience Pilot Program, which provides funding and authority to establish a trauma informed pilot program to model and test the kind of community based, trauma informed, effective program that will provide the support families need in order to avoid the costly interventions of the Child Welfare Services branch that include removal, foster care, and sometimes permanent financial support for children in permanent placement. The concept of a pilot program based in the Office of Wellness and Resilience takes the next step in creating the kind of child welfare system our community needs and wants.

In 2023 the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group was established to develop recommendations to establish a child welfare system that is trauma-informed, sustains a community-based partnership, and responds to the needs of children and families in the system and the community. I serve as Co-Chair of the working group. The working group has completed its work and a full copy of the report can be found at www.malamaohana.net, however the working group is still subject to sunshine law until adjournment sine die. To be clear, the working group will not be making further decisions now that the report has been filed. The working group may meet during the session to provide information to the public about its report but will not make further decisions. Therefore, it is not allowed under sunshine law that more than two of us meet to discuss the report, or next steps. Therefore, I am testifying as a concerned citizen and speaking for the content of the report that was approved by the working group.

Our first task as the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group was to establish an approach to our work by cultivating and modeling the kind of listening and concern that we needed for our working group and modeling the type of child welfare system we hope for. From there, we began with the intense work of interviewing individuals, conducting conversations, and holding group discussions in Permitted Interaction Groups, which helped shape our initial understanding. We then conducted eleven community listening sessions throughout the state, gathering stories and ideas from each community we visited. Perhaps the most emphatic hope expressed was for a system that helps families before crises occur. Community members want clear, accessible pathways for families to get help without fear of punishment or child removal. They envision a network of community-based resource centers (Ka Piko) where families can access concrete supports like housing assistance, food, transportation, and childcare. These

centers would offer comprehensive family strengthening programs and universal parent support services that any family could access. Key components of the Ka Piko network would be peer support and assistance with accessing services.

Here is what we heard:

The report emphasizes that accessible, community-based resource centers are crucial to prevent family crises and reduce involvement in Child Welfare Services (CWS). Key points include:

1. **Prevention and Support** – Community resource centers can provide families with early intervention and preventative services to address challenges before they escalate into crises requiring CWS involvement.
2. **Accessibility and Trust** – Families often do not seek help because they fear punishment or CWS involvement. Locally embedded centers staffed by trusted community members can offer a safe, judgment-free space.
3. **Culturally Responsive Services** – Many families feel disconnected from mainstream services. Resource centers grounded in Native Hawaiian values and community traditions can offer culturally relevant support.
4. **Coordination of Services** – These centers could connect families with essential services, such as food, housing assistance, childcare, parenting education, domestic violence support, and substance use treatment.
5. **Strengthening Family Resilience** – By offering consistent and reliable support, resource centers would reduce stressors that contribute to child welfare cases, helping families stay together.

Recommendations for the Family Resilience Pilot Program:

The report suggests developing Ka Piko or Family Resource Centers as part of a transformed family support system. The Family Resilience Pilot Program aligns with these recommendations which include:

1. **Establishing Community-Based Centers**
 - Develop locally operated family resource centers in various communities across Hawai'i.
 - Staff the centers with individuals with lived experience, community leaders, and service providers.
 - Ensure they are accessible, welcoming, and free from stigma.
2. **Providing a Wide Range of Support Services**
 - Offer basic needs assistance, such as food, clothing, and housing support.
 - Provide parenting classes, mental health support, domestic violence resources, and substance abuse treatment referrals.
 - Include legal aid and advocacy services to help families navigate complex systems like CWS, courts, and housing.
3. **Preventing Family Separation**

- Create alternatives to CWS intervention by giving families access to voluntary, supportive services.
 - Offer counseling, conflict resolution, and economic support to help stabilize households.
 - Provide safe spaces where parents can receive help without fear of punitive consequences.
4. Cultural and Community Integration
- Ensure that centers incorporate Native Hawaiian cultural practices, including healing practices like ho'oponopono.
 - Engage community elders, cultural practitioners, and faith leaders to provide holistic, culturally appropriate support.
5. Ongoing Funding and Sustainability
- Secure state and federal funding to sustain operations.
 - Collaborate with nonprofits, businesses, and community organizations for financial and logistical support.
 - Ensure accountability and oversight to maintain high-quality services.

This pilot program will help implement the recommendations of the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group in tangible ways, building upon the mandate of a trauma informed state and the innovative and impactful work of the Office of Wellness and Resilience.

The Pilot Program is a preventative, supportive space that keeps families stable, reduces reliance on government agencies, and offers accessible, community-driven solutions to family challenges. By providing immediate assistance and long-term support, these centers would reduce family stressors, minimize child removals, and help families heal and thrive. We recommend that OWR coordinate its efforts with the initiatives already in place for Family Resource Centers, in order to grow that concept while grounding it in community and lived expert voices. Also, we recommend that the Pilot Program explore opportunities to utilize TANF reserves, and other resources that can maximize the impact of these funds and save money in the future.

We are grateful for your support of the families and children in the child welfare system, and your efforts to find ways to improve the system.



To: Committee on Health and Human Services

Hearing Date/Time: Wednesday February 5, 2025 1:00 PM

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 1399

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Members of the Committee

The Hawaii Health & Harm Reduction Center (HHHRC) **supports SB 1399** which directs the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) to implement a Family Resilience Pilot Program and appropriate funds.

HHHRC's mission is to *reduce harm, promote health, create wellness and fight stigma in Hawaii and the Pacific*. We focus our efforts on those disproportionately affected by social determinants of health, including but not limited to: people living with and/or affected by HIV, hepatitis, substance use, and the transgender, LGBTQ and the Native Hawaiian communities.

HHHRC is striving to be a trauma-responsive agency and the data that comes out of this pilot will support agencies like HHHRC and others to integrate best practices from this exciting program. More than ever, we need to build resilience in our families and communities and this pilot will support the identification of services (and the way the services are delivered) that need to be scaled up and replicated. We must have local data from local projects if we are going to become the "trauma informed state" we all deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Heather Lusk, Executive Director, Hawaii Health and Harm Reduction Center

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February 3, 2025

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair, and Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

From: Karen Worthington, Private Citizen

Re: **SB 1399: Relating to Trauma-Informed Care**
Hawai'i State Capitol, Room 225 and Videoconference, February 5, 2025, 1:00pm

Position: SUPPORT

Dear Senator San Buenaventura, Senator Aquino, and Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of HB 1300, which establishes a five-year family resilience pilot program within the Office of Wellness and Resilience. This innovative program represents a critical shift toward prevention and early intervention that will help strengthen Hawai'i families and reduce the risks of families becoming involved with child welfare services.

My name is Karen Worthington, and I am a children's law and policy attorney with a consulting business on Maui, Karen Worthington Consulting. I have worked as a lawyer in and around state systems affecting children and families throughout my 30-year career. I am certified as a Child Welfare Law Specialist by the National Association of Counsel for Children. I have worked extensively with Hawai'i state departments and nonprofit organizations that support children and families who exist at the margins of our society.

Please pass HB 1399. This pilot program will strengthen our support for families in several important ways:

- It creates a comprehensive support system that includes peer support navigators with lived experience, who can effectively bridge the gap between families and needed services while building trust through shared understanding.
- It addresses the critical connection between poverty and child welfare involvement by providing immediate financial assistance and concrete supports for basic needs like food, housing, and transportation—supports that can prevent crisis and stabilize families.
- It recognizes, as demonstrated by extensive research, that most families who come to the attention of the child welfare system need support services rather than protective intervention, and it provides those services in a way that strengthens rather than disrupts families.
- It implements evidence-based practices, including peer support services that have been recognized by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services since 2007 as an effective intervention.
- It responds to new federal requirements under Public Law No: 118-258 (enacted January 4, 2025), which allows states to use Title IV-B family preservation funds for “peer-to-peer mentoring and support programs with demonstrated experience fostering constructive relationships between children and families and mentors with relevant lived experience or interactions with the child welfare system.” (42 USC 629a(a)(1)(G)). Public Law 118-258 also adds a definition of “family support services” which can be provided through Title IV-B funds, providing further support for the pilot program in HB 1399.

Karen Worthington, Kula, HI 96790

The conditions that often lead to child welfare involvement - inadequate food, housing instability, lack of supervision while parents work, or untreated medical conditions - are frequently direct results of economic hardship. This pilot program creates a framework for providing appropriate support rather than unnecessarily involving families in the child welfare system.

The Office of Wellness and Resilience is uniquely positioned to develop and implement this pilot project in partnership with DHS and community-based service providers. If you would like additional information related to my testimony, please do not hesitate to contact me at karen@karenworthington.com.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Worthington". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Karen Worthington



TO: Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Dana Matsunami, Child Welfare Attorney at the National Center for Youth Law

RE: SB 1399 Relating to a Family Resilience Pilot Program

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Committee Members,

My name is Dana Matsunami, I am an attorney at the National Center for Youth Law. I live and work here in Hawai'i, where I focus on issues relating to foster care in our state. On behalf of the National Center for Youth Law, I am testifying in **support** of SB 1399, which will establish a five-year family resilience pilot program within the Office of Wellness and Resilience.

Preventative measures that address the root causes of family stress—such as financial hardship, housing instability, and lack of access to healthcare—are far more effective at promoting child safety and wellbeing than reactive interventions that focus on family separation. The Family Resilience Pilot Project will ensure that families in Hawai'i have access to concrete supports they need to thrive, like food and shelter, community-based resource centers staffed by individuals with lived experience, and housing, childcare, and physical and mental health care.

One of the recurring themes throughout the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group community meetings was parents sharing that they knew they needed help – such as food, shelter, childcare, therapy, parenting classes – but faced barriers to accessing support. Indeed, often support was only made available once parents had a child welfare case opened against them – once they and their children had been through the traumatic experience of removal and foster placement. By focusing on building resilience and concrete supports within families and communities, this bill responds to the heartfelt requests families made during the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group for support rather than separation and punishment. Families also shared they were afraid to seek help for fear they would be reported to child welfare services. **With this in mind, we urge the Committee to consider amending the bill to specify that these preventative services will not be subject to mandatory reporting.** Studies have shown that when families fear they will be at risk of child welfare involvement if they seek help, they often choose not to seek the support they need – an outcome at odds with the goals of this pilot program.

SB 1399 represents an essential shift towards a more compassionate, evidence-based and effective system for caring for our families in Hawai'i. By investing in prevention and care, we can ensure that families not only stay together but also thrive.

The National Center for Youth Law urges you to pass this bill out of committee, amending the language to ensure that these services are not subject to mandatory reporting. Mahalo for your consideration and for the opportunity to testify.

Dana Matsunami
Skadden Fellow, National Center for Youth Law