



OFFICE OF HAWAIIAN AFFAIRS

Legislative Testimony

HB 2551 RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

House Committee on Human Services & Housing

February 14, 2008

9:25 am

Room 329

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs supports HB 2551. Our interest in this legislation is primarily based on our concern that 40% of the overall population of individuals who experience homelessness in Hawaii are Native Hawaiian. The 2003 homeless census revealed that there were 6,029 homeless individuals at any point-in-time in Hawaii and approximately 14,500 in a given year.

OHA generally agrees that there is need for near-term solutions to Hawaii's affordable housing and homeless problem, which will only escalate beyond reasonable management without immediate intervention and funding by the State. The State is the largest stakeholder and is charged with the greatest responsibility or "kuleana" to make available safe and affordable housing for all of its residents. The appropriations being recommended are necessary and a movement in a proactive direction toward resolving these critical issues.

With shelters like those built on the Leeward Coast last year already full and with waitlists, the need to make more State resources available to develop alternative shelters is essential. However, shelters are only part of the solution. OHA supports this bill because it directs the Hawaii Public Housing Authority to conduct a study that will look at homeless solutions that include support and programmatic services. We recommend the study also research ways to prevent homelessness from occurring among our residents, beginning with financial literacy education in our schools.

OHA urges your support for this bill. Mahalo nui loa for the opportunity to present testimony.

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Statement of
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Before the

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOUSING

February 14, 2008, 9:25 a.m.
Room 329, Hawaii State Capitol

In consideration of
H.B. 2551
RELATING TO HOMELESSNESS

The Hawaii Public Housing Authority (HPHA) supports the intent of H.B. 2551, which responds to the need for living accommodations for Hawaii's homeless.

Unless there are no other alternatives, we cannot support the concept of homeless campgrounds. Efforts in the past to provide temporary campgrounds have proved extremely costly for a temporary fix, while the needs of the homeless continue well beyond the life of the temporary solution.

Homeless providers have the extremely challenging task of providing multiple services to help the homeless repair their lives, while providing a safe and secure living environment for the children and families. Part of the "hand up" is teaching families to make better choices, caring for the living unit, playing their bills on time, nurturing and overseeing the children, and participating in the community. These are fostered in housing units where there is controlled access, rules that all must follow, and security – already a challenge at a homeless shelter, but a far greater difficulty in a campground setting.

The HPHA supports longer term solutions that provide a network of services within housing units, be they shared accommodation in multi-unit complexes, or individual rental units. Please note that HPHA's funding priorities as indicated in the Executive Supplemental Budget includes \$20,000,000 for a permanent homeless facility on Oahu.

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