



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809

**LATE**

January 31, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
Senate Committee on Human Services and Public Housing

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: S.B. 2246 - RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD  
ALLOWANCE FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

Hearing: January 31, 2008 Thursday, 1:30 p.m.  
Conference Room 016, State Capitol

PURPOSE: The purpose of S. B. 2246 is to expand the opportunity for former foster youth to pursue and complete post-secondary education, by increasing the length of the time to apply for a higher education board allowance and extending the maximum benefit length from 48 months to 60 months.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department strongly supports the intent of this bill because expanding post-secondary opportunities for former foster youth will enhance the likelihood that former foster youth will obtain an appropriate post-secondary education and make successful transitions to self-sufficiency.

However, in lieu of a new bill, the Department would suggest passing out of Conference Committee, H.B. 1356, H.D. 2, S.D. 2,

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the administration-sponsored bill from the previous session, with the following amendments:

1) Revise the dates in section 346-17(a)(2) to substitute July 1, 2008 for each occurrence of July 1, 2007 and June 30, 2009 for June 30, 2008.

2) Deletion of Section 3 requesting an appropriation to fund the increased benefits. The Department believes that cost savings in other areas of the current budget will be sufficient to cover the costs for providing the proposed higher education board allowances for the 60 months proposed in H.B. 1356.

3) Modification of the current Section 5 to change the effective date from July 1, 2007 to July 1, 2008.

H.B. 1356, H.D.2, S.D. 2, contains the language that will allow the Department to provide higher education board allowances to former foster youth with greater flexibility and to the maximum extent. S.B. 2246 would limit the length of benefits to only 66 months following the entry into an institution of higher learning. This means that if the youth enters into higher education at the age of 18, the benefits will expire by the time the youth reaches the age of 23 years and 6 months. Also, S.B. 2246 does not allow breaks in attendance as H.B. 1356 does.

S.B. 2246 proposes that youth shall be eligible "prior to or" after reaching the age of majority [page 1, line 15]. Until the age of majority, the youth is usually living a licensed foster home and is eligible for foster care services which

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include foster board maintenance payments and other benefits, including activity fees, special circumstance payments and a clothing allowance. Youth eligible for and receiving higher education board allowance payments are no longer eligible for these benefits and would only receive the higher education board allowance. Department suggests the deletion of the "prior to or" phrase. In H.B. 1356, the higher education board allowance benefits begin at age 18 so the youth would not lose any of the benefits they were eligible for as a minor.

The Department has found that the number of former foster youth participating in the higher education program has dramatically increased over the past several years, from approximately 30 participants in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 1998 to approximately 210 in SFY 2007. This trend in the increasing number of former foster youth pursuing post-secondary education is due to aggressive outreach efforts by the Department and its partners, including the Hawaii Foster Youth Coalition, purchase of service contracted independent living service providers, the Hawaii Foster Parent Association, the Family Court's Project Ho'Kahua, and the Heart Gallery Hawaii. In addition, the Department has made information available on the Department's website about our independent living and higher education programs.

Providing higher education board allowances to former foster youth represents a needed investment in our most precious

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resource - our youth, through which we have the opportunity to improve the future outcomes for our keiki and our communities.

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

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2246**  
**RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD ALLOWANCES**  
**FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH**

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony on SB2246 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowances for Former Foster Youth, in strong support of the bill.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii is the largest non-profit provider for direct civil legal services in the State. Further, since 1996, we have assisted over 2,000 children as guardian ad litem on Oahu, Maui, Hawaii'i, Moloka'i and Lāna'i, a significant number of whom have aged out in foster custody.

Based on our experience, we believe that this bill is important to improving the prospects for former foster youth. Currently, former foster youth are at much higher risk than the general population of becoming homeless, incarcerated, involved in violence, or to re-enter the system as parents of abused and neglected children. Higher education board allowances have been a strong step in the right direction towards helping youth transition successfully. Higher education board allowances relieve much of the financial burden of going to college and relieve some pressure on youth to enter the job force with no training and few prospects. Utilization of these payments has helped many youth become successful adults.

Unfortunately, the narrow window on entering the program has left many youth out who would benefit from the payments. Many youth, on turning 18, leave with a desire for freedom and a reluctance to be involved with "the system" or, even more sadly, leave without even knowing what benefits and services are available. After a year or two of "freedom," they realize that they are not capable of surviving on their own—or are faced with homelessness. Expanding this program will enable those youth who didn't go to college or job training programs immediately after exiting to have avenues to escape the poverty that often accompanies a young adult with no training, no skills, and no support system. Passage of this bill will further the goal of transitioning our foster youth and helping them become healthy, productive adults.

For these reasons, we support SB2246.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

M. Nalani Fujimori  
Deputy Director  
527-8014

**LATE**

January 30, 2008

To: Honorable Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
FROM: Linda Santos, President & CEO, Foster Family Programs of Hawai'i  
RE: Senate Bill 2246

Hearing: January 31, Thursday, 1:30 p.m., Capitol Room 016

Purpose: Senate Bill 2246 – Allows a former foster youth to be eligible for higher education board allowance until the age of twenty-one and for a period of five and one-half years.

Introduction: I am Linda Santos, President and CEO of Foster Family Programs of Hawaii. We provide services to prevent foster care placement; support children and families involved in out of home placement; and assist young adults emancipating from the foster care system.

Agency Position: Foster Family Programs of Hawai'i supports the bill making former foster youth eligible for higher education until the age of twenty one and for a period of five and one-half years, as foster youth often not ready to enter college directly after high school graduation.

Research demonstrates that too few of the foster children who complete high school apply for entry into postsecondary education. Low expectations by their caretakers and low self-esteem among foster children may play a part, as does lack of information or counseling on how to apply and lack of information on how to obtain financial aid.

From my years of experience with foster youth transitioning out of foster care, the reality may be that most foster children simply are not be mature enough or ready to attend post secondary education, directly out of high school. The most successful foster youth I have seen, are those that mature first and continue school at a little later in life. I believe that foster youth will have a higher success rate in completing college if they can begin when they are ready, rather than directly after completing high school

The fact is that foster youth are highly under represented among college students. "Higher Education Opportunities for Foster Youth" indicates that there are approximately 300,000 foster youth between the ages of 18 and 25, including those who have aged out of the child welfare system. Only about 150,000 of these foster youth have graduated from high school and are college qualified, and of these college-qualified foster youth, only one in five is attending college. Let's give Hawaii's foster youth a little more time to grow up and support to succeed in higher education.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.