

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB2246 SD1**  
**RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD ALLOWANCES**  
**FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH**

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony on SB2246 SD1 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, Hawai'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

TO: Committee on Ways and Means  
Senator Baker, Chair

FROM: Hawaii Foster Parent Association  
Judith Wilhoite, Executive Director

RE: SB 2246, HD1 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance  
for Former Foster Youth

Date: Friday, February 22, 2008

Dear Senator Baker,

The Hawaii Foster Parent Association (HFPA) is in strong support SB2246.

The statistics for youth who “age out” of foster care are dismal. Within 2 to 4 years of leaving the system, fewer than half are employed, 25% have been homeless, 65% of the young women have given birth, 30% do not have health care and fewer than one in five are self-supporting.

We believe that by improving the ability of our youth to achieve their educational goals and their full potential, our youth will enjoy better outcomes, thus promoting a healthier community for all.

Additionally, this bill addresses a perverse choice some of our children must face while in foster care. Currently, if a child becomes available for adoption as a teen and there is a family who wants to adopt this child, the child would lose the higher education board payment from DHS if the child is adopted. We believe that no child should have to choose between a forever family and higher education funding. This bill will allow foster children aged 16 and older to chose adoption and retain their higher education payments.

**I would like to emphasize that this bill will NOT require funding for the Department of Human Services has the funds to implement the changes in this program in their budget.**

Again, we believe that one of the greatest hopes for a happy, productive life for our foster youth is for them to attain higher degree of education. This bill goes a long way in helping assure more of our youth have that opportunity.

Thank you for this opportunity to support this very important bill,

Judith Wilhoite

Executive Director  
Hawaii Foster Parent Association

# HAWAII YOUTH SERVICES NETWORK

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Joseph Fichter, President

Judith F. Clark, Executive Director

Acadia Hawaii Residential Treatment  
Center (Formerly Children's  
Comprehensive Services)

Adolescent Services Program, Kaiser  
Permanent Medical Care System

Aloha Pride Center

American Civil Liberties Union of Hawaii

Assistive Technology Resource Ctrs. of HI  
Bay Clinic, Inc.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Honolulu

Big Island Substance Abuse Council

Blueprint for Change

Bobby Benson Center

Catholic Charities Hawaii

Central Oahu Youth Services Assn.

Child and Family Service

Coalition for a Drug Free Hawaii

Community Assistance Center

Domestic Violence Action Center

EPIC, Inc.

Family Support Services of West Hawaii

Foster Family Programs of Hawaii

Friends of the Missing Child Center of HI

Hale Kipa, Inc.

Hale 'Opio Kauai, Inc.

Hawaii Behavioral Health

Hawaii Foster Parent Association

Hawaii Student Television

Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies Coalition

Hina Mauka Teen Care

Kahi Mohala Behavioral Health

Kama'aina Kids, Inc.

KEY (Kualoa-Heeia Ecumenical Youth)  
Project

Kids Behavioral Health

Kids Hurt Too

Kokua Kalihi Valley

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The Maui Farm, Inc.

Maui Youth and Family Services

Palama Settlement

P.A.R.E.N.T.S., Inc.

Parents and Children Together (PACT)

Planned Parenthood of Hawaii

Salvation Army Family Intervention Svcs.

Salvation Army Family Treatment Svcs.

Sex Abuse Treatment Center

Susannah Wesley Community Center

Turning Point for Families

Waikiki Health Center

Women Helping Women

YWCA of Kauai

February 20, 2008

To: Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chari  
And members of the Committee on Ways and Means

## Testimony in Support of SB 2246 SD1 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth

Hawaii Youth Services Network, a statewide coalition of more than 50 youth serving organizations, supports SB 2246 SD1 Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth.

Each year, about 100 young people age out of the foster care system and have a one-year window of opportunity to apply for higher education board payments and through age twenty-one to complete college or vocational training.

Some youth are not ready to move on to college immediately following high school. Others are not informed by their case workers or foster families about the availability of these benefits. They need additional time to apply.

Youth seeking a four-year college degree often need more than four years to complete the degree requirements, especially if they are employed at the same time. University of Hawaii statistics show that the average time needed to obtain a bachelor's degree is 5.5 years at present. They need additional time to complete their degree programs.

Without higher education assistance, former foster youth face a bleak future. Up to 30% of youth exiting foster care become homeless before age 21 because they lack the skills to obtain a living wage. In a national study of former foster youth aged 18 - 24, only 48% had completed high school. Two to four years after they left the system, only 38% had stayed employed and 48% had held a full-time job. We need to help our foster youth to gain the education that will enable them to become productive, contributing adults.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Judith F. Clark, MPH  
Executive Director

A JOINT LEGISLATIVE EFFORT

E-Mail: [testimony@Capitol.hawaii.gov](mailto:testimony@Capitol.hawaii.gov)

Regarding: Senate WAM Hearing

Hearing on: February 22, 2008 @ 11:00 a.m. in room #211

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**Date:** February 20, 2008

**To:** Senate Committee on Ways & Means  
Honorable Roslyn Baker, Chair  
Honorable Shan Tsutsui, Vice Chair

**From:** Kelly M. Rosati, JD  
Executive Director, Hawaii Family Forum

**Re:** **Strong Support for SB 2246 SD 1 Relating to Higher  
Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth**

Honorable Chair and members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, I am Kelly Rosati representing Hawaii Family Forum (HFF), a non-profit, pro-family education organization committed to preserving and strengthening families in Hawaii.

As many of you know, HFF works on a variety of family issues ranging from domestic violence, affordable housing, homelessness, Darfur divestment, children's access to health care, physician assisted suicide and traditional marriage preservation.

What you may not know is that finding families for Hawaii's legal orphans is also a top policy and direct service priority.

As such, SB 2246 SD 1 is among our top priorities because its passage will have a profound impact on the ability of Hawaii's legal orphans to be adopted into forever families – for life. **Failure to pass this bill will leave in place an unintended but perverse systemic disincentive that prevents older, waiting orphan children from being adopted.**

Please allow me to explain.

Hawaii Family Forum and HOPE In the Name of Christ (INC) foster care and adoption agency have a contract with the Department of Human Services to recruit, train, and support adoptive parents for Hawaii's 'difficult to place' foster children.

These are children whose lives have taken a typically tragic path that looks something like the following scenario:

- They've been abused, neglected and/or abandoned by their birth parents, the very people who are supposed to protect them in life from such tragedy

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- Their birth parents parental rights had to be terminated so they would have a chance at a safe and happy life
- They've been in more foster homes than anyone cares to count for more years than any child should ever endure
- They now live in temporary foster homes, waking up every day knowing that they could move that day and knowing that the family with whom they are living with won't adopt them.

These children are usually older and have special needs and challenging behaviors because of the trauma they have been through in their short lives. During the process of trying to find adoptive families for these minors, we have encountered countless cases where foster parents tell us that they won't adopt the minor in their care because "if we adopt, the child will lose the benefits they get by staying in the system as a foster kid." The primary benefit mentioned: higher education.

The failure to extend the higher education benefits to former foster children who get adopted is a policy literally trapping foster kids in the system. The policy operates like golden handcuffs, preventing too many of our foster kids from achieving the permanency and security of an adoptive family.

Let me tell you about a few of the children whose entire lives and futures are being adversely affected by this unjust policy: (Names are changed to protect confidentiality)

- 12 year old Krystal has been in foster care her whole life. Her foster parents refuse to adopt her, opting instead for guardianship because they don't want her to lose higher education benefits. Instead, she is losing her only chance for a permanent, forever family of her own. If we had adoption parity and the benefits followed into her adoptive family, Krystal would have a family.
- 17 year old Joshua's adoptive parents waited to adopt him until he was 18 so that he wouldn't lose his college benefits
- Social workers told us not to bother trying to find adoptive families for the young teens in their caseloads because they don't want them to lose their college benefits: so instead they lost their opportunity to be adopted . . . .

We urge you to change this unfair policy.

In addition to supporting the above change, we also support the other provisions in SB 2246 SD 1, increasing the time limit for application for a higher education board allowance and increasing the maximum age for the benefit from 21 to 26 years with a maximum benefit length of 60 months. Given the start these kids have had in life, many need a little extra time to finish their education. It is worthwhile giving them the extra time as higher education is among the key ingredients helping them rise above their traumatic beginnings.

Please support these changes and eliminate this inequity, promoting adoption parity by extending higher education benefits to foster kids blessed to find forever adoptive families.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.



The Children's Alliance  
OF HAWAII, INC.

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ALFRED J. HERRERA  
PRESIDENT

TO: Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair  
Senator Shan S. Tsutsui, Vice-Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Alfred Herrera, President  
The Children's Alliance of Hawaii, Inc.  
(808) 599-2955 x 215

HEARING: 11:00 am, Friday, February 22, 2008, Room 211

RE: Support of S.B. 2246 S.D.1 Relating to Higher Education Board  
Allowance for Former Foster Youth.

The Children's Alliance of Hawaii is a non-profit organization, incorporated in 1987. We provide supportive services to sexually abused children on Oahu and Kauai in order to assist them in the healing process and offer hope for their future. Each year we serve over 700 children. Many of the children we serve are in foster care.

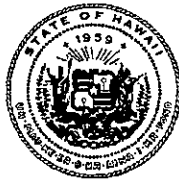
We strongly support S.B. 2246 S.D.1, Relating to Higher Education Board Allowance for Former Foster Youth. This measure will help former foster youth by granting additional time to create a stable living situation while remaining eligible for the higher education board allowance. Former foster youth who are given this extra time will be better prepared to meet the challenges of an independent adulthood, and will consequently have greater chances for success when they enter an institution of higher education.

Through our Ho'omaka Program we work with foster youth and prepare them for their transition to adulthood by assisting them to determine, define and develop a pathway for achieving their life goals. We see first hand the positive benefit this measure will have, and how it will significantly increase the likeliness that our former foster youth will achieve their goals and become healthy, productive, adult citizens.

Per their testimony dated January 31, 2008, we applaud the Department of Human Service for their commitment to fully funding this measure through their own cost saving efforts.

We urge the committee to pass S.B. 2246 S.D.1.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.



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

February 22, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Lillian B. Koller, Director

SUBJECT: S.B. 2246, S.D. 1 - RELATING TO HIGHER EDUCATION BOARD  
ALLOWANCE FOR FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

Hearing: February 22, 2008 Friday, 11:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 211, State Capitol

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of S. B. 2246, S.D. 1, 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 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.

The Department would like to thank the Senate and its Human Services and Public Housing Committee for incorporating the language of the Administration bill from the 2007 Legislative



Session, H.B. 1356, H.D. 2, S.D. 2, into the S.D. 1 of this bill. This revision will allow the Department to provide higher education board allowances to former foster youth with greater flexibility and to the maximum extent.

The Department is not requesting additional funding to implement this bill. We anticipate that the current budget will be sufficient to cover the costs of the proposed higher education board allowances for the balance of this biennium.

As one of our former foster youth stated at a previous hearing on this bill, this legislation provides us with the opportunity to offer a "hand-up" not a "hand-out." Providing higher education board allowances to former foster youth represents a needed investment in our most precious 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.