

HB 395

WRITTEN COMMENTS

LATE

Date of Decision Making: April 2, 2009

Committee: Senate Ways and Means

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Patricia Hamamoto, Superintendent

Title: H.B. 0395, H.D. 1, S.D. 1 (S.S.C.R. 0995) Relating to Early Learning

Purpose: Requires the department of education, beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, to use successful assessment tools and protocols for determining a student's initial placement and for decision making about a student's movement between junior kindergarten, kindergarten, and into grade one; clarifies the provisions of the early learning system including authorizing designees for all members of the early learning council, changing the name of the keiki first steps trust fund to the early learning trust fund, and specifying that moneys in the early learning trust fund shall not lapse to the credit of the general fund at the end of each fiscal year.

Department's Position: The Department of Education (Department) is in support of H.B. 0395, H.D. 1, S.D. 1 (S.S.C.R. 0995). In view of the current fiscal situation, this bill will allow the work of the Early Learning Council (Council) to continue, and ultimately ensure that the developmental and early learning needs of young children are

equitably addressed throughout the state. However, the Department recommends the following amendments, suggested by the Council, be incorporated into this bill.

First, the Council is asking that all members of the Council, including the two (2) representatives of the Hawaii Council of Mayors, be allowed to designate an alternate in the case that they cannot attend a scheduled meeting. Second, the Council is requesting that the unencumbered, unexpended funds in the current appropriation be allowed to lapse into the Early Learning Trust Fund at the end of the current fiscal year.

The Department welcomes the opportunity to continue working with its early childhood partners, in both public and private settings, to ensure access to quality early learning opportunities, including the young learners in our two-tiered kindergarten program. In total, our collective efforts will help young children to be at optimal levels of readiness for learning, particularly as they make the transition into a K-12 learning system. At the same time, the Department respectfully requests that the Legislature continues to consider funding initiatives to enhance the early childhood programs for four-year olds throughout the state.

As appropriate, the Department respectfully requests that this bill be expedited so that actions may ensure that unexpended and unencumbered funds are secured in the trust fund at the closing of the fiscal year in June 2009.