

LATE

Testimony for Committee on Human Services

Date: 2/12/09

Time: 1:45 pm

Place: Capitol Building, Room 016

From: Susan Ogami-Van Camp, EPIC 'Ohana Connections Program Manager

LATE

Re: Senate Bill 1006

PURPOSE: The purpose of this bill is to clarify that local customs of caring for children outside the family home by relatives and friends are, where appropriate, available alternatives to the Department of Human Services and the Court assuming custody of children.

EPIC's POSITION: EPIC Ohana Conferencing strongly supports this bill for several reasons.

It will allow children to safely remain with relatives and family friends with whom the child is already familiar and connected (the child will have been in the home for at least six months). These relatives can include grandparents, aunts and uncles, as well as siblings, cousins, and other extended family members.

This bill also supports allowing the child to remain at the same school and live in the same neighborhood where the child often has established connections with teachers, schoolmates, and neighborhood friends. Maintaining these familiar connections while being physically separated from the child's parents can reduce the trauma of loss resulting from the child's separation from the his or her parents.

Allowing the child to remain with relatives and family friends without unnecessary government intervention can be culturally sensitive as the home in which the child lives may be assessed by the Department to meet the child's safety needs and yet due to current difficult economic conditions, the caregivers

are not able to meet licensing requirements such as space and number of household members. If government intervention is required, the child might be removed and placed in a stranger's home and sibling groups could be split up. This is especially true for recent immigrant groups where there are often many people living in the same household and the home does not meet foster home licensing requirements for space. EPIC is keenly aware of situations in which children have had to move from hanai family or friends are placed with nonrelatives who are unfamiliar to the child.

Again, EPIC supports this bill. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.