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DEPARTMENT OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
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Testimony of the Office of Community Services

Good Morning Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Brower and members of the committee,

My name is Sam Aiona and I am testifying as the Executive Director of the Office of the Community Services supporting the intent of SB 1203, SD2. The Office of Community Services (OCS) currently administers over seventy contracts in eighteen program areas to ensure the self-sufficiency of low-income persons, refugees, and immigrants.

OCS at this time continues to support the intent of the bill, and is appreciative of the Senate's efforts to alleviate our concerns regarding the implementation of the program. As stated in the previous House committee, some issues still exist that need to be addressed before this bill becomes law. Again, the mandate of the Office of Community Services addresses the needs of low-income and disadvantaged persons, as well as refugees and immigrants. Our mission statement, under §371K-1, HRS, is to "facilitate and enhance the development, delivery, and coordination of effective programs for those in need..." As stated previously, OCS is not averse to undertaking this task; however we would like to be clear that under our current mission statement we would be unable to offer such a program to those outside our mandate. As such, OCS may not be the appropriate agency to coordinate this effort or produce this report. We defer to the Legislature to consider this question.

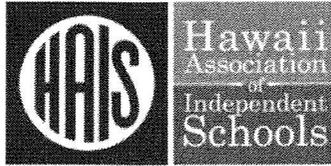
Additionally, it remains unclear where these funds would come from. There is also a lingering issue over the verbiage "any educational program," which does not specify type, duration, or qualifying features that would ensure that the monies held in trust would be used to effectuate the intent of the legislation.

OCS recognizes there would be tremendous savings to the State with such labor applied to common, menial tasks, as well as a valuable work experience benefit to the individual doing the service. However, if the individuals providing this "community service" were to receive such remuneration, this may disqualify them from utilizing the hours spent towards areas that require "community service" in a stricter sense without compensation, such as out-of-state college applications.

We acknowledge that the Legislature recognizes the massive scope of this bill and would like to suggest, as OCS currently only has an office on O'ahu, the Legislature limit the measure to geographical region of its choice in this county as a pilot project. The reduced area would allow our small office to manage this project in the manner it deserves, while reducing manpower hours spent by other State agencies, the University System, and the Department of Education on a statewide collaboration effort.

In the hearing before the House Committee on Labor the merits of the bill were clearly recognized by everyone participating in the crafting of this measure, including the chair. However, it was also recognized by Chair Rhoads that this undertaking will most likely require some sort of financing to become reality. As the Legislative Session begins to wind down, the Office of Community Services would like to offer our support and participation should sponsoring Legislators wish to continue the implementation discussion post-Session.

I thank you for your time and the opportunity to testify, and am available to answer any questions you may have.



March 23, 2009
8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 329

TESTIMONY TO
THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

RE: SB 1203 SD2 – Relating to Community Service

Dear Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Brower, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Robert Witt, and I am executive director of the Hawaii Association of Independent Schools (HAIS), which represents approximately 97 private and independent schools across our state.

The Association supports Senate Bill 1203, Senate Draft 2 – Relating to Community Service, which would require the Office of Community Services of the Department of Labor and Industrial Relations to establish a voluntary community service program. This program would allow all residents ages fifteen through eighteen to earn scholarship funds and use them to finance the educational program of their choice.

HAIS is of the belief that community service programs not only present students with the opportunity for unique, real-world learning experiences, but also teach them the value and importance of civic responsibility and engagement. Such programs bring schools together with local nonprofit organizations and State departments for the benefit all parties involved, providing the community with much-needed volunteer support and the students with the opportunity to connect with and give back to their communities, as well as acquire valuable character education.

Beyond all this, SB 1203 SD2 offers students an additional benefit – by linking participation in community service activities with the earning of scholarship funds, the measure would provide students who volunteer their time to support the health and well-being of their community with the means to finance their continued studies. The proposed program would make it possible for a greater number of students to afford a post-secondary education, while also promoting the very habits of mind and heart that we want to instill in all of our keiki. For these reasons, we encourage the Committee to pass this measure.

Mahalo for this opportunity to testify.

To: COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES
Rep. John M. Mizuno, Chair

Rep. Tom Brower, Vice Chair

Date: Monday, March 23, 2009

Subject: Senate Bill 1203 :

The department of labor and industrial relations office of community services will establish a voluntary program to allow all state residents between the ages of fifteen and eighteen years, inclusive, to serve a minimum of five-hundred hours of community service. In exchange for this service, the participants shall earn \$3 per hour in scholarship funds that shall be used to finance any educational program chosen by participants until the age of thirty. All funds earned by participants shall be placed in a trust fund established by the office of community services for the participants' use for educational purposes.

As a Graduate student in the field of social work and a mental health professional living and working in rural island communities I see firsthand the issues facing teenagers today. Many of our youth are engaging in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use and abuse, sexual behaviors, thefts, and violence. Some of the reasons for this are the lack of structured programming in their communities. Their parents are unavailable when they come home from school due to the need to work one or more jobs in order to put food on the table during these tough economic times. The ages between 15 and 18 are very crucial in the development of good habits for being a successful and productive adult. Having a job also provides the youth with a sense of accomplishment and often builds their self-esteem which in turn allows them to make better choices regarding health and safety.

Doing community service allows these youth to engage in real world hands on learning experiences. It can teach them the value and importance of civic responsibility. This idea of giving back to their community is an important part of the Hawaiian culture. It is a way to bring the community and family values back into the teen's consciousness.

SB1203 allows the community to benefit also because of programs or tasks that could not be completed due to the lack of funding. The teens are able to be productive community members by supporting the community in which they reside.

Another positive component of this bill is that the youth will have the money they make from their community service put into a trust fund and then be able to use that to further their education. This is very critical for our teens because of the underrepresented populations of Hawaiians, Filipinos and other island residents attending colleges and universities.

This positive youth development concept gives the teens a chance to exercise leadership, build skills, and get involved. The self-confidence, trust, and practical knowledge that young people gain from these opportunities help them grow into healthy, happy, self-sufficient adults.

The youth, who become actively involved in making our world a better place will one day, be adults helping to solve problems for future generations.

Mahalo for this opportunity to present testimony. Lynne Brauher MSW student UHH