

Testimony on SB 1666
Relating to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
Adult Friends for Youth
February 3, 2009
1:15 PM

LATE

Good afternoon Chair Chun-Oakland and members of the Committee. Adult Friends for Youth supports a position that would enable the State to draw down TANF reserve funds to meet critical needs of children and families at risk for health, financial, physical, and emotional harm, at this difficult and dangerous time in our community's economic life. Failure to do this can be expected to increase the harm, not only to the at risk population, but to the community at large.

The goals of this bill have value as long as they reflect the needs of Hawaii's highest risk population. But the devil is, as always, in the details, and this bill is short on details.

It is good to support job training and financial self-sufficiency. However, this can only be accomplished if programs that have the ability to reach young people who are most likely to drop out of school and drop out of the workforce are supported. In the first place the confidence of youth in the target population must be achieved. In the second place the people who are being served will need help to believe in their potentialities for success.

It is also good to educate young people about the "effects of teenage pregnancy" and "educated decision-making." However, in and of themselves these words are no more than platitudes. Those at whom this education is addressed must first be in a good enough place to make use of the information that is provided. Education is only half the battle and the easiest half at that. It will only have meaning if the helping person is valued and respected. To achieve that sort of meaningful relationship takes time.

The importance of helping families become "self-sufficient, stable, and educated" is self-evident, but easier said than done. However, like the other goals of this bill it is not unachievable. The most difficult task is to acquire a non-threatening and approachable relationship with at-risk families. Adult Friends for Youth with over two decades of experience under its belt has found that the most effective way of reaching parents is through their children. It has found that when the child succeeds families take pride in that success and begin to believe in a better future for themselves.

Thank you for your attention to my testimony.

Testimony on SB 1666
Relating to Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF)
Presented by Malakai Maumalanga M.S.W.
Adult Friends for Youth Master Practitioner
February 3, 2009
2:45 PM

Aloha,

LATE

My name is Malakai Maumalanga and I am a social worker with Adult Friends for Youth. But I wasn't always a social worker. I am a former gang member who went to prison for a drive-by shooting. As a teenager, I had many issues. My biggest problem was that I was very angry and very violent. Without the intervention of AFY, I would have ended up as another statistic.

Now as a social worker, I deal with my former self, in my clients and family that I serve on a daily basis... dropouts, teen parents, drug addicts... They are at very high risk of becoming destructive to themselves and to our communities, and of becoming adult criminals. Yet they have that potential to achieve higher education, to become stable emotionally and financially, and to make the right decisions and become productive members of society, with the weekly therapy sessions that deal with their issues and explore possible solutions to their problems, providing support to foster that growth.

I know we are facing hard times, but hard times will come and go. The majority, if not all of us in this room, as individuals, will survive because we are educated, stable and able to make informed decisions. But the youths and families that need the services, the support, and the programs will struggle more in these challenging times. This is when the youths and families need the services most in order to see and feel that there is a light at the end of the tunnel. There is a need for TANF funds in order for agencies to continue providing effective services that will allow these youth and families to overcome their handicap.

Malakai Maumalanga, M.S.W.
Master Practitioner
Adult Friends for Youth