

George J. Zweibel, Esq.
President, Board of Directors

M. Nalani Fujimori, Esq.
Interim Executive Director

SB1668 SD2 - RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES
TESTIFYING IN SUPPORT

March 16, 2009 at 8:00 a.m.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii hereby provides testimony in support of SB1668 - RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES to the House Committee on Human Services.

The Legal Aid Society of Hawaii provides free legal services to the low-income population of the State of Hawaii. We provided civil legal assistance to those in need through nine offices located in Lihue, Waianae, Honolulu, Kaneohe, Kaunakakai, Lanai City, Wailuku, Kona and Hilo. Over the years we have provided leadership around public benefits issues and on an annual basis update our public benefits manual and provide a two-day training on public benefits.

As written, this bill would create a single disability benefits program for the aged, blind, temporarily incapacitated and disabled. This single disability benefits program would ensure that all those on disability assistance would continue to receive the same level of assistance regardless of type of disability. It would combine the two current programs Assistance to the Aged Blind and Permanently and Totally Disabled and General Assistance just as their current budget code is. By doing so there would be no disparities between the assistance provided nor difficulties with the transferring of funds between programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

M. Nalani Fujimori
Interim Executive Director



House HUS Cmte
Mon, Mar 16, 2009
8:00 am
room 329

National Association of Social Workers

Hawaii Chapter

March 14, 2009

TO: Representative John Mizuno, Chair
Members of the House Human Services Committee

FROM: Debbie Shimizu, LSW
National Association of Social Workers, Hawaii Chapter

RE: SB 1668 SD2 Relating to Human Services- **SUPPORT**

Chair Mizuno and members of the House Human Services Committee, I am Debbie Shimizu, Executive Director of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), Hawaii Chapter. I am also a member of the Financial Assistance Advisory Council (FAAC) of DHS and the Welfare and Employment Rights Coalition (WERC). **NASW supports SB 1668 SD2.**

The purpose of SB 1668 SD2 is to clarify public assistance eligibility requirements for aged, blind, temporarily incapacitated, and disabled persons and create a single program for both the Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) and General Assistance (GA) programs. Currently the GA program is funded by a block grant appropriated by the Legislature. The Department has admitted that having GA as a fixed block grant is difficult to maintain when the number of individuals applying for GA is increasing. As we are experiencing this year, the amount of individuals on GA is currently 5,100 individuals. Because the GA block grant was fixed at an amount during the last legislative session when the amount of individuals on GA was less, the appropriation for the block grant is inadequate to support everyone eligible for GA at the current amount of \$469/month. DHS must cut the GA assistance to \$234 for the remaining three months of the fiscal year. We are hopeful that there will be an appropriation for the new fiscal year to support disabled individuals at \$450.

SB 1668 SD2 will place all individuals who are aged, blind, and temporarily disabled into an entitlement program and not a block grant. It will help to keep the financial support for these individuals at a consistent level throughout the year. This is the only source of financial cash assistance available for these disabled individuals. Many of them use this source of income for rental payments, utilities and other living expenses other than food.

The Financial Assistance Advisory Council has discussed this issue with the DHS and both have agreed to proceed making both programs (ie, ABD and GA) entitlement programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

~~Subject: Confidential~~

From: Joel Fischer [mailto:joel.fischer@hawaii.edu]
Sent: Friday, March 13, 2009 11:41 AM
To: HUS testimony
Cc: info@naswhi.org
Subject: SB1668;HUS;Monday, 3/16/09;8AM;Rm329

Importance: High

SB1668, SD2
HUS; Chair, Rep Mizuno

I STRONGLY SUPPORT THIS BILL. PLEASE PASS IT!

As a member of FAAC and WERK, I urge the committee to keep this alive for discussion in Finance. There are 2 major reasons why:

1. While we are delighted with the passage of HB1098, we have no idea how it will be received and/or amended in the Senate. There are some parallels between the 2 bills and we must keep at least one alive in both Houses.
2. This bill would make an historic change in the welfare system as we know it. No longer would any one be able to discriminate against GA clients because GA would be eliminated/

There may be negative testimony from DHS on these changes even though Director Koller was very interested in some of them at a FAAC meeting. There may even be negative comments from the AG office. We have to ignore them for now to keep this vehicle alive.

Just remember, AG spelled backwards is GA! Maybe that's why they don't like it!

Thank you for your fantastic support for the safety net!.

Aloha, joel

Dr. Joel Fischer, ACSW
President, 19-3, Democratic Party

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University of Hawai'i, School of Social Work
Henke Hall
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"It is reasonable that everyone who asks justice should DO justice."
Thomas Jefferson

"There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but one must take it because one's conscience tells one that it is right."
Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.