

Representative Marcus Oshiro, Chair, Finance Committee

February 18, 2010

**Testimony of
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Office of the Under Secretary of Defense, Military Community and Family
Policy
DoD-State Liaison Office**

Support of: HB 2061 HD 1 Relating to Children: Child Custody (Evans)

The Department of Defense State Liaison Office operates under the direction of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, and the Deputy Under Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy. Our mission is to be a resource to state policymakers as they work to address quality of life issues of military families.

Testimony

Chair Oshiro, on behalf of the Department of Defense, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today on HB 2061 HD 1, a bill relating to child custody and Service members. Many divorced Service members have custody of, or visitation rights with, children whose other parent is not the Service member's current spouse. Many of these Service members who are deployed away from their family find that States do not consider the unique aspects of military service when making custody decisions. These absences due to military service can undermine and disrupt existing arrangements, creating stress on parents and children.

Although the Department of Defense believes the welfare of the child is paramount, it also believes the demands of military service should not abrogate the parent's rights. The Department thinks States are in the best position to balance such equities and believes there are several protections states could enact which would serve both the parent's rights and the welfare of the children. Fourteen states, including Hawaii, have introduced legislation so far this year to address this issue.

The policy put forth in the language of HB 2061 HD 1 appears to address many areas of concern related to Service members and child custody. We

believe these additional protections assist in addressing the unique aspects of military service when balancing equities involved in decisions about child custody and will strengthen state policy in this regard.

We also do not believe there will be a fiscal impact involved with these changes.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to Hawaii's leadership in adopting these vital protections for our Service members. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any concerns or questions.

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