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February 10, 2016

To: Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair
Senator Breene Harimoto, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education

From: Deborah Zysman, Executive Director
Hawaii Children's Action Network

Re: **SB 2595, Relating to the Public Pre-kindergarten Program –
Support**
Hawaii State Capitol, Room 229, February 10, 2016 – 1:15 P.M.

On behalf of Hawaii Children's Action Network (HCAN), formerly Good Beginnings Alliance, we are writing in support of SB 2595, Relating to the Public Pre-kindergarten Program.

HCAN is committed to improving lives and being a strong voice advocating for Hawai'i's children. Last fall, HCAN convened input in person and online from more than 50 organizations and individuals that came forward to support or express interest for a number of issues affecting children and families in our state that resulted in the compilation of 2016 Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda, which can be accessed at <http://www.hawaii-can.org/2016policyagenda>.

HCAN supports SB2586, the omnibus bill to establish a dedicated source of funding in support of public education in Hawaii and to allocate funds to several programs, and this bill SB2595 to authorize funding for the expansion of the state's pre-kindergarten program. These initiatives raise a fundamental question about whether the state should create a set aside through a tax increase to supplement and not supplant current level funding for pre-kindergarten to 12 grade and to provide critical supports for teachers. This question is raised in multiple school districts each year through tax levies or tax set-asides and voters have generally replied with a resounding, "YES!"

HCAN commends the Committee and HSTA for having this critical discussion. Other states and more communities are targeting investments earlier in strategies focused on children under age five and expectant mothers through home visiting for new parents and their children. Part X of this bill would provide for the expansion of funding for the Executive Office on Early Learning to make the program available to all eligible children by SY 2020-2021, which HCAN supports.

Last year, \$2.8 million was appropriated in the State Budget for the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) Pre-kindergarten program, which operates in 19 public elementary schools serving approximately 420 children across the state. EOEL is still trying to restore positions that were cut in the previous budget and restore basic funding for its operations. This bill would help to solidify the program and allow for much needed expansion of DOE's public prekindergarten program into other areas of the state. However, given the initial challenges to get DOE pre-kindergarten classrooms up and running. It will likely take longer than SY 2020-21 to fully expand pre-kindergarten into other areas of the state.

In addition, the state's public charter schools also need to secure a more stable source of funding for the pre-kindergarten expansion being funded through a multi-year federal grant. Currently, there are four public charter schools with pre-kindergarten programs with several planned for the next two years to come on line.

There is no debate that early learning opportunities have long lasting positive influence on children. We know, for example, that over 85 percent of a child's brain is developed by the age of five. Moreover, we know that almost 50 percent of Hawaii's four-year-olds receive little or no formal school readiness experience before entering kindergarten. Despite positive advances over the past two years, Hawaii still remains far behind other states in providing early childhood education. Ultimately, this means that our DOE system must devote time and resources to bringing these children up to speed with their counterparts who have had some form of early learning experience. By investing in our children early, we help save our DOE time and money. This initiative may also help Hawaii compete for more federal funds for early learning programs

As the state plans for the expansion public prekindergarten classes to other schools, we also urge for the restoration of the EOEL office staff and operations budget in the supplemental appropriations budget, which direly needed to restore and maintain the minimum required operations for EOEL to carry out its duties and functions.

For these reasons, HCAN respectfully requests that members of the Senate Committee on Education pass SB2586 and SB2595.



HAWAII GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION

AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

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**The Twenty-Eighth Legislature, State of Hawaii
The Senate
Committee on Education**

**Testimony by
Hawaii Government Employees Association**

February 10, 2016

S.B. 2595 – RELATING TO EDUCATION

The Hawaii Government Employees Association, AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO supports the intent of S.B. 2595 which requires the Executive Office on Early Learning to make the public pre-kindergarten program available to all eligible children no later than the 2020-2021 school year, and appropriates funds for the program.

This measure appropriates funds for the early learning public pre-kindergarten program and seeks to make the program available to all eligible children by the 2020-2021 school year.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of the intent of S.B. 2595.

Respectfully submitted,

**Randy Perreira
Executive Director**