

Date: March 17, 2022

To: Senate Committee on Education
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Comments on SCR13/SR7, Relating to a Study on Universal No-Cost Pre-Kindergarten

Early Childhood Action Strategy (ECAS) is a statewide cross-sector collaborative designed to improve the system of care for Hawai'i's youngest children and their families. ECAS partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

ECAS appreciates the intent of SCR13/SR7, which request the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct a study on the feasibility of the state establishing a universal, no-cost pre-kindergarten program, and offers the following comments:

- The state has previously researched and developed plans for preschool expansion. If a Universal Pre-Kindergarten feasibility study were to move forward, efforts should **build from existing research**, including the Hawai'i Early Childhood State Plan, the Hawai'i Preschool Development Grant Birth Through Five Early Childhood Comprehensive Needs Assessment, and the soon-to-be released Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE3) Project.
- The Early Learning Educational Task Force Report (Act 259, 2006), identified workforce as the major barrier for expanding preschool services to four-year-olds. Since that time, workforce conditions have only worsened, particularly as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Any new Universal Pre-Kindergarten feasibility study should place **workforce concerns** and proposed strategies for addressing recruitment, retention, compensation and professional development needs at the center.
- A **mixed-delivery system**, which administers funds across licensed center- and family-based child care programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, public schools, and community-based organizations, has been identified as the most cost-effective and sustainable solution for delivering affordable high-quality early care and education to all children. New research into the feasibility of Universal Pre-Kindergarten in Hawai'i should specifically explore utilization of a mixed-delivery system in its approach to universal prekindergarten.
- Limited private-participation or public-only delivery systems for prekindergarten can have significant negative consequences on families and the early care and learning system, particularly in relation to child care for **infants and toddlers**. In addition to an examination of a mixed-delivery system approach to universal prekindergarten, any new research should include a review of impacts of other universal prek approaches on infant/toddler care and measures for mitigating potential negative consequences on the availability, cost and quality of child care and early learning services for infants and toddlers.

- Finally, any recommendations emerging from a Universal Pre-Kindergarten feasibility study should be in-line with the **Executive Office on Early Learning's** nationally recognized public preschool program and be inclusive of the **State Public Charter School Commission's** early learning/preschool programs.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony on these resolutions.



Hawai'i
Children's Action Network Speaks!
Building a unified voice for Hawai'i's children

LATE

To: Senator Kidani, Chair
Senator Mercado Kim, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Education

Re: **SCR 13/ SR 7 Requesting the legislative reference bureau to conduct a study on the feasibility of the state establishing universal, no-cost pre-kindergarten program.**
3:15 PM, March 18, 2022

Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Mercado Kim, and committee members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, thank you for the opportunity to **testify in support of SCR 13/SR 7, Requesting the legislative reference bureau to conduct a study on the feasibility of the state establishing universal, no-cost pre-kindergarten program.**

There is great need in Hawai'i's to expand access and availability for preschool. The passage of Act 46 (2020) and the state's Early Childhood State Plan give a foundation that will allow the growth of programs if we can ensure the conditions are favorable. One area that needs consideration is the availability of workforce. It is an ongoing issue within early childhood, as the state does not have enough early childhood educators to meet the need. Additionally, there are other areas that need greater attention if expansion in a universal sense can occur. For these reason, we suggest the resolution be amended to request LRB to also consider:

- Workforce supports, including compensation;
- The feasibility to deliver preschool through a mixed delivery system;
- Governance structures; and
- Sufficient and sustained funding.

Early childhood programs set the foundation for life. **For these reasons, HCAN Speaks! respectfully requests the Committee to support this measure.**

Thank you,

Kathleen Algire
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy