
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the health and
2 development of children under age five is critical to
3 strengthening Hawaii's communities. There are approximately
4 twenty-nine thousand keiki from birth to age five in Hawaii with
5 mental health needs. The legislature also finds that early
6 mental health issues are caused by biological and developmental
7 special needs at birth, child abuse and neglect, exposure to
8 intimate partner violence, parental substance abuse, housing
9 insecurity, and poverty. These mental health issues result in
10 social and emotional development delays that negatively impact
11 adult and child relationships, peer interactions, and the
12 ability to manage emotions appropriately. Without a system of
13 services and supports in place, children with mental health
14 needs are at risk for future behavioral and academic issues.

15 Furthermore, the legislature finds that interventions at an
16 early stage of life can result in future cost savings for
17 special education, mental health treatment, juvenile justice,



1 and incarceration. Parents, pediatricians, home visitors, and
2 child care providers can be the first responders to mental
3 health concerns. Identifying problems early and intervening
4 before they increase in severity will provide the best chance of
5 helping young children with mental health needs to succeed and
6 lead healthy and happy lives. .

7 Additionally, the legislature finds that unmet childhood
8 mental health needs were on the rise before the COVID-19
9 pandemic and have since worsened. In a preliminary study,
10 published by the Journal of the American Medical Association,
11 Columbia University researchers found that compared to babies
12 born just before the COVID-19 pandemic, babies born during the
13 first year of the pandemic scored lower on a developmental
14 screening test of social and motor skills at six months
15 regardless of whether their mothers contracted COVID-19 during
16 pregnancy. Other factors, including fewer play dates and
17 altered interactions with stressed caregivers, may help explain
18 why babies born during the pandemic have weaker social and motor
19 skills than babies born before the pandemic.

20 The legislature also finds that the COVID-19 pandemic and
21 its economic impacts have disproportionately affected groups



1 already experiencing disparities and inequities. Native
2 Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders do not have equitable access to
3 preventive care, services, and treatment to address physical and
4 mental health needs. These inequities contribute to family
5 stress, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences, and
6 they perpetuate intergenerational and historical trauma.

7 The purpose of this Act is to create an infant and early
8 childhood mental health program in the department of health.

9 SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is
10 amended by adding a new section to part XXV to be appropriately
11 designated and to read as follows:

12 "§321- Infant and early childhood mental health
13 program; established. (a) There is established within the
14 department of health the infant and early childhood mental
15 health program, to provide and support mental health services
16 for children from birth to age five. The program shall be
17 focused on providing children with the ability to:

18 (1) Form close and secure adult and peer relationships;
19 (2) Experience, manage, and express a full range of
20 emotions; and



1 (3) Explore the environment and learn, all in the context
2 of family, community, and culture.

3 (b) The infant and early childhood mental health program
4 shall develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery
5 of services and workforce training in a variety of settings,
6 including early child care and learning, home visitation, and
7 early intervention, and promote better understanding of the
8 needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive
9 early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care."

10 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general
11 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so
12 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023-2024 and
13 the sum of \$ or so much thereof as may be necessary
14 for fiscal year 2024-2025 for the establishment and operations
15 of the infant and early childhood mental health program,
16 including the establishment of one permanent full-time time
17 equivalent (1.0 FTE) position.

18 The sums appropriated shall be expended by the department
19 of health for the purposes of this Act.

20 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.



1 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on June 30, 3000.



H.B. NO. 1053 H.D. 1

Report Title:

Department of Health; Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program; Appropriation

Description:

Establishes the infant and early childhood mental health program within the department of health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five. Appropriates funds. Effective 6/30/3000. (HD1)

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