

STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH  
KA 'OIHANA OLAKINO  
P. O. Box 3378  
Honolulu, HI 96801-3378  
doh.testimony@doh.hawaii.gov

**Testimony in SUPPORT of SB1351  
RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.**

SEN. JOY SAN BUENAVENTURA, CHAIR  
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Hearing Date: February 15, 2023

Room Number: 225

1 **Fiscal Implications:** \$800,000 general fund appropriation.

2 **Department Testimony:** The Department of Health (DOH) supports SB1351, which is an  
3 Administration Legislative Proposal. The last officially published strategic plan from DOH  
4 prioritized the need to create and promote systems of care that support infant and early childhood  
5 health, in particular 0 – 5 age range, which is when 90% of a child's brain develops.

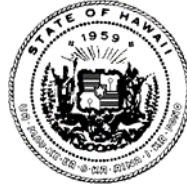
6 The Office of Wellness and Resilience, the Executive Office on Early Learning, the Lieutenant  
7 Governor's early childhood education focus, and many other public and private initiatives are  
8 critical stakeholders in this conversation. The department looks forward to continued discussion  
9 on this measure to assure that leadership and coordination is robust, and that agency expectations  
10 are clear.

11 Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

12 **Offered Amendments:** N/A.

13

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 13, 2023

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 1351 – RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.**

Hearing: February 15, 2023, 1:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this administration measure and defers to the Department of Health (DOH).

**PURPOSE:** This bill 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, develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care.

DHS appreciates the Legislature's investment in early childhood, including supporting children's social and emotional development. Early intervention services, including infant and early childhood mental health services, can increase parenting and child development knowledge and strengthen a family's ability to observe and respond to their child's needs. DHS will continue to work with DOH and community stakeholders to deliver various services for children and families.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
**Executive Office on Early Learning**  
2759 South King Street  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

February 13, 2023

**TO:** Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

**FROM:** Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director  
Executive Office on Early Learning

**SUBJECT: Measure:** S.B. No. 1351 – RELATING TO INFANT & EARLY CHILDHOOD  
MENTAL HEALTH  
**Hearing Date:** Wednesday, February 15, 2023  
**Time:** 1:00 pm  
**Location:** Conference Room 225

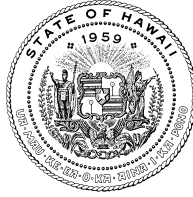
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Supports the Intent**

EOEL supports the intent of S.B. No. 1351 and defers to the Department of Health.

EOEL works with stakeholders to establish a system that ensures a solid foundation of early childhood development and learning for Hawaii's children from prenatal to age five. Supporting early mental health and development in the youngest years is critical. Mental health issues, even at this stage of the earliest years, can be caused by biological and/or development factors, experiences of trauma such as family violence, child abuse and neglect, parental substance abuse, and experiencing systems of poverty. These issues may result in developmental delays that could have long-lasting and detrimental impacts to children's health and development.

EOEL supports the Legislature's efforts to provide an infant and early childhood mental health program to implement strategies that aims to support and strengthen young children's growth, development, and learning by identifying, intervening, and preventing issues at some of the earliest stages of life. We also appreciate the Legislature's intent in the bill to support workforce training across the various early learning settings as workforce supports will be critical in implementing effective programming.

We look forward to continuing to work with other stakeholders and departments to continue strengthening the systems of support for our youngest keiki across the State. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**  
Wednesday, February 15, 2023  
1:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference  
**In Support of**  
**S.B. No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health**

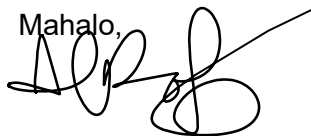
Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and members of the Committee:

The Office of the Wellness and Resilience (OWR) in the Governor's Office is in **SUPPORT** of S.B. No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

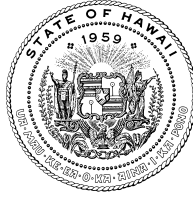
Established through Act 291, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2022, OWR will address barriers and build wellness and resilience through trauma-informed, strengths-based strategies and support agencies in their efforts to address trauma-informed care and move toward a collaborative, shared purpose of collective system reform.

As negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic continue to show up in our daily lives, awareness, and prevention of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) is a priority for our state. The OWR is dedicated to addressing the impacts of ACEs for keiki to kupuna, and this bill will increase resources for early childhood intervention and create additional support for keiki and their families through access to effective trauma-informed mental health resources.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this measure.

Mahalo,  


Tia L R Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA  
Executive Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience  
Office of the Governor



EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS  
KE KE'ENA O KE KIA'ĀINA

JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA

**Senate Committees on Health and Human Services**  
Wednesday, February 15, 2023  
1:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 and Videoconference

**In Strong Support**  
**S.B. No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health**

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

The Office of the Governor **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** S.B. No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, adverse childhood experiences or ACEs can have lasting and lifelong negative effects on the health and well-being of our keiki. Increasing resources for early childhood intervention will create additional support for families and ensure that these families have access to mental health resources.

This bill would help to address this ongoing need by creating a new Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program within the Department of Health. This program would increase access to mental health services for children from birth to age five and work to develop and implement flexible strategies to better understand the needs of our infants and young children across the state.

Many children struggle with mental health challenges, and the pandemic only intensified and highlighted the ongoing challenges they are facing. We are at a critical juncture in increasing awareness of, and access to, mental health services to improve outcomes for Hawaii residents and build healthier communities. S.B. No. 1351 is a step in the right direction to achieving this goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this measure.

TO: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Robert G. Peters, Chair  
Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: Measure: S.B. No. 1351 – RELATING TO INFANT & EARLY  
CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH

Hearing Date: Wednesday, February 15, 2023  
Time: 1:00 pm  
Location: Conference Room 225

EARLY LEARNING BOARD POSITION: Support the Intent of S.B. No. 1351

EOEL supports the intent of S.B. No. 1351 and defers to the Department of Health.

The Early Learning Board (ELB) is composed of early learning and care stakeholders from both the public and private sectors. The Board governs the Executive Office on Early Learning and supports its efforts to ensure a solid foundation of healthy child development and learning for Hawaii's *keiki*, prenatal to age five. Critical to that work is ensuring that young children's mental health is supported and those impacted by early trauma (child abuse, poverty, family violence, child neglect) are cared for and offered the supports needed to develop into healthy individuals. Without such support, young children are likely to experience developmental delays that potentially will negatively impact their growth over time.

ELB supports the Legislature's efforts to provide an infant and early childhood mental health program to implement strategies that aim to support and strengthen young children's growth, development, and learning by identifying, intervening, and preventing issues at some of the earliest stages of life. We also appreciate the Legislature's intent in this bill to support workforce training across the various early learning settings as workforce supports will be critical in implementing effective programming.

Thank you for the opportunity to support the intent of S.B. No. 1351.



*The Judiciary, State of Hawai'i*

**Testimony to the Thirty-Second State Legislature  
2023 Regular Session**

**Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**  
Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.  
State Capitol, Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY**

by:  
Jessi L.K. Hall  
Judge, District Family Court  
Family Court of the First Circuit

---

**Bill No. and Title:** Senate Bill No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health.

**Purpose:** 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, develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care.

**Judiciary's Position:**

The Judiciary takes no position on Senate Bill No. 1351, but acknowledges the need for effective mental health programs, to include those for our youngest and most vulnerable members of our community.



Senate Bill No. 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Wednesday, February 15, 2023 at 1:00 p.m.  
Page 2

Many believe that trauma endured by babies does not have a lasting effect. Through our Hawai'i Revised Statutes Chapter 587A cases, especially our Zero To Three specialty court, we have learned that just is not true. The actions of adults towards our youngest keiki can have a lifelong impact on their mental health. Our community has had limited access to mental health programs for keiki from ages zero to five. Research shows that when keiki can commence an effective treatment earlier in their development, we observe better outcomes for their future. As a community we owe it to all keiki to be provided with the opportunity to have the best start to life possible.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.





## HAWAI'I COMMUNITY FOUNDATION

**TO:** Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair

**FROM:** Micah A. Kāne, Chief Executive Officer & President

**DATE:** February 12, 2023

**RE:** Support for SB 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

The Hawai'i Community Foundation (HCF) **strongly supports** Senate Bill 1351 (SB 1351) relating to infant and early childhood mental health (IECMH). This bill would help to better coordinate mental health across the lifespan, inclusive of Hawai'i's 0- to 5-year-olds. Currently, no one agency or department is responsible for coordinating IECMH and as a result programs and services are not regularly part of a cohesive system of prevention and care.

HCF is supporting the bill as it relates to the [Promising Minds](#) Initiative focused on keiki ages 0-5 and their families; and the potential positive impact it has on the broader [Health and Wellness sector of the CHANGE Framework](#) of which preventative mental health is a large part. It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under 5 are in need of mental health supports.

In 2019, HCF launched Promising Minds, a four-year initiative dedicated to improving early childhood behavioral health in Hawai'i by investing in the future of our keiki, especially those at-risk of trauma, abuse and neglect, or dealing with their aftereffects. Hawai'i Community Foundation and co-funders of Promising Minds have invested \$5 million in strengthening Hawai'i's mental health system so it includes infants, toddlers, preschoolers and their families. Promising Minds has worked with over 100 early childhood providers and 60 clinicians across our island home to provide them with new knowledge and skills in early childhood mental health and trauma-informed practices. Through the Promising Minds evaluation, early childhood providers that participated in professional development were asked about the trauma that they encounter when working with families, HCF learned that domestic violence (52%) and emotional abuse (48%) were reported as most prevalent. The Promising Minds evaluation has helped illuminate that:

- Practitioners from a variety of early childhood settings (child care, home visiting, early intervention, early Head Start) **recognized the need for more practitioners within the system** that are trained or specialize in trauma-informed care, such as IECMH consultants.
- Practitioners shared that an **increase in trained, trauma-informed care professionals** would ensure that children and families do not get lost when navigating systems.
- Practitioners are interested in **strengthening their internal data practices** to guide program improvement related to trauma-informed practices and child and family wellbeing. Many want to be able to better communicate the results of their program. A stronger IECMH system would help to address this program need.

Another component of Promising Minds is the IECMH Fellows Program by the Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i (AIMH HI). The purpose of this program is 1) to increase the proficiency and confidence of mental health professionals that work with Hawai'i's youngest children and their families and 2) grow the number of consultants that serve as a direct resource for those families and the community that serves them. As a result of the Fellows Program, Hawai'i has a growing network of professionals that have demonstrated competencies in IECMH. Characteristics of the Fellows include an average of 10 years practicing in the mental health field, primarily working in a program or agency; they are program managers, social workers, licensed clinical therapists and counselors.

**The Promising Minds evaluation findings showed that IECMH Fellows identified the children and families they work with had experienced the following types of trauma.**

Emotional abuse	94%
Foster care/transition of care	94%
Exposure to domestic violence	90%
Physical abuse or assault	90%
Homelessness	90%
Neglect	90%

Additionally, the efforts of Promising Minds, the IECMH Fellows Program, and other activities help to meet key objectives in [Hawai'i's Integrated Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan](#). The Plan developed out of a critical need for integration to ensure behavioral health support was accessible and equitable for all keiki. Through its implementation through public-private partners Hawai'i has received new federal funds to support the work, increased the IECMH workforce and made efforts to strengthen the systems serving children and families.

Finally, SB 1351 builds on work that is currently underway. Since 2022, Hawai'i Community Foundation has participated alongside nine organizations and state agency divisions on the IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team. The public-private team has been working on a two-year project to build a sustainable and accessible IECMH consultation system. By December 2023, the team will have a finalized plan. The new IECMH program in DOH could utilize this plan to implement its programming.

I believe this bill will address the needs caused by trauma and toxic stress that increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the pandemic has waned, infants, toddlers and preschoolers and their families are experiencing poor mental health. If we provide an ounce of prevention in the early years, the social and health benefits can positively impact a lifetime.

Mahalo for hearing this important bill and I urge the Committee to move SB 1351 forward.



February 15, 2023

TO: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair and Members  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Kerrie Urosevich, Co-Chair  
Commit to Keiki

RE: S.B. 1351  
Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Commit to Keiki **STRONGLY SUPPORTS** Senate Bill (SB) 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. SB 1351 is Governor Green's bill to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) program in the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five.

It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under 5 are in need of mental health supports. Since 2018, the Hawaii Community Foundation has partnered with several philanthropic organizations to invest approximately \$5 million in Promising Minds to expand young children's mental health supports and make them a full part of an inclusive mental health system. While philanthropy's investment has identified and started to address a critical community need, the demand for services, especially post-COVID, is overwhelming and state participation is critical to both provide additional services and to access federal funding in this new, growing practice area.

Significant government-nongovernment efforts are underway to help build a sustainable and equitable statewide IECMH consultation system. Anchoring IECMH into the Department of Health will create much needed infrastructure to coordinate local efforts, get consultants into our community and to secure available federal funds to expand IECMH to needed communities.

As Governor Green frequently says, "Hawaii's children deserve a trauma-free life." The creation of the IECMH program now will build on and anchor the work already underway and enable Hawaii's keiki to have a brighter start.

Thank you for allowing Commit to Keiki to provide testimony on this important measure.

Commit to Keiki, a project of the Early Childhood Action Strategy, is a public-private collaborative to ensure that Hawai'i's youngest children (birth to 5 years old) and their families have a brighter start. Early Childhood Action Strategy is a project under Collaborative Support Services, Inc. Led by a diverse Steering Committee, with representatives from Hawai'i business, education, early intervention, nonprofit and philanthropic organizations, Commit to Keiki serves as a trusted partner and reliable resource for information on issues related to Hawai'i's youngest keiki and families.



Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

---

Date: February 13, 2023

To: Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair; Committee on Health & Human Services  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair; and  
Members of the Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

From: The Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawaii, dba AIMH HI

RE: Senate Bill 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

Hearing: February 15, 2023 1:00 PM

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important bill that intends to establish a system of infant and early childhood mental health consultation for children from birth to five years of age. My name is Erin Henderson Lacerdo, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health.

The Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health (dba AIMH HI) was founded in 2008 with the vision that *In Hawai'i the early years are celebrated and revered, first relationships are nurtured, and infant and early childhood mental health is everyone's kuleana.*

Our mission is to be *the go-to resource for sharing expertise and advancing practices that ensure Hawaii's youngest keiki grow up emotionally healthy and resilient.*

This bill presents an incredible opportunity to build a system of consultation, with the potential to create a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate mental health continuum that spans prevention to intervention, that will support not only the children of Hawai'i, but also the workforce that supports those children. There is a critical shortage of mental health services for children 0-5 and their families, and further, many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health. High quality consultation can not only increase the quality of existing programs but can also increase staff retention through the creation of a supportive environment.

As the Infant and Early Childhood system is built out, we strongly request the following elements be included as program components.

- 1) **The IECMHC system is competency-based.** It is not enough that a mental health consultant has a mental health license. Supporting such young children requires that the primary caregivers are integrated and considered, and as such, we recommend using nationally accepted competencies set forth by the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health ([https://mi-aimh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-consultant-competencies\\_with-Alliance-Logo.pdf](https://mi-aimh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-consultant-competencies_with-Alliance-Logo.pdf)) and the Center for Excellence in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (<https://www.iecmhc.org/documents/IECMHC-competencies.pdf>).
- 2) **Consultants are highly qualified.** To assure that consultants are developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and specialized in supporting young children and their families, consultants should be selected from the roster of vetted professionals who

Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i (AIMH HI)  
P.O. Box 235147, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96823  
[www.aimhhi.org](http://www.aimhhi.org)



Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

- demonstrate competency in infant and early childhood mental health and consultation. This roster is managed and maintained by the Public and Private Rostering Body.
- 3) **Consultants are supported.** Consultants receive on going, Competency® based Reflective Supervision. Reflective Supervision will aid in retaining these highly qualified and specialized consultants in the profession.
  - 4) **Consultants are connected.** Consultants have access to and are part of a community of practice that is based in on going professional development and are reviewed annually by the Public and Private Rostering Body.
  - 5) **The field is supported.** There is an ongoing workforce development plan and commitment to investing in the growth, mentoring, and development of future IECMH consultants. IECMH Consultants which in turn support the retention of the overall IECMH workforce that is currently experiencing a critical shortage.
  - 6) **The system is a public-private partnership.** The Integrated Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan (<https://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/hawaii-plans/hawaiis-integrated-infant-and-early-childhood-behavioral-health-iecbh-plan/>) began the work to coordinate efforts between public and private entities. We implore that this plan is referenced and utilized as a resource in developing the system, including the adoption of the definition of IECMH consultation:
    - a. *"IECMHC is a prevention-based approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, home visiting, early intervention, community programs and their home. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to facilitate children's healthy growth and development. It starts from the premise that all relationships in a child's life matter and works to promote both strong relationships and supportive environments for children, all of which are key to brain-building."*

AIMH HI will be happy to provide staff and committee members with justification and details of these requested program components.

In partnership with Hawai'i Community Foundation Promising Minds initiative AIMH HI has trained over 60 potential consultants in competency-based consultation.

HB 1053 will build on the work that is already under way to develop an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation model. Since 2022, Hawaii's IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Council has been working with ZERO TO THREE and Georgetown University on a two-year project to build a sustainable, equitable, accessible statewide IECMH consultation system. The key components listed above are being further developed by the Council.

This cross-sector group of includes representatives of experts and early adopters in home visitation, early intervention, and early childhood care and learning settings. Members of this group come from philanthropy, mental health, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Executive Office of Early Learning, Head Start/Early Head Start, and other invested partners.



The creation of a IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health will be able to implement this team's work to ensure that Hawaii can effectively support the social-emotional and mental health needs of our youngest children.

AIMH HI respectfully requests that your committee acknowledge the hard work of the IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Council as laying a foundation for the work to be undertaken by the new IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health created by this bill in your committee report. The new IECMH consultation program created by HB 1053 will be armed with a well-developed action plan that complements and augments existing plans, such as the Early Childhood State Plan, and can build on the work that is already underway.

**We thank you for your commitment to a high quality, competency-based system for infant and early childhood mental health consultation.** Thank you for this opportunity to testify and offer additional information about Governor Green's timely proposal to create an IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health.

Na'u nō me ka ha'aha'a,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Erin Henderson Lacerdo', is positioned below the Hawaiian phrase.

Erin Henderson Lacerdo, LCSW, IECMH-E®  
Executive Director  
Hawaii Association for Infant Mental Health



Date: February 13, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry J.C. Aquino, Vice Chair  
Committee Members

From: Early Childhood Action Strategy

Re: Strong Support for SB 1351, Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health

---

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. Over 300 ECAS network partners work to align priorities for children prenatal to age eight, streamline services, maximize resources, and improve programs to support our youngest keiki.

**ECAS strongly supports passage of SB 1351.** SB 1351 is Governor Green's bill to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) program in the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five.

Infant and early childhood mental health has been identified as a top priority by all ECAS teams. Data is showing that our keiki's social and emotional development scores are dropping. It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under 5 need mental health supports. Since 2018, direct service providers, philanthropic organizations and representatives from Department of Health, Department of Human Services and the Executive Office on Early Learning have been working together to implement the [Integrated Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan](#), funded predominately by philanthropy, with close to \$5 million in investments.

State investment and infrastructure is critical at this time to sustain what has been built, expand services, and meet the developmental needs of our keiki. Anchoring infant and early childhood mental health in the Department of Health will strengthen's Hawai'i's competitive opportunities for federal funding, create centralized coordination and enable the integration of IECMH into home visiting, early intervention and child care in a systematic way.

As Governor Green frequently says, "Hawaii's children deserve a trauma-free life." The creation of the IECMH program will focus on prevention, thereby saving millions in downstream mental health interventions and will enable Hawaii's keiki to have a brighter start.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony **in strong support of SB 1351.**





CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

**TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HB 1053:  
RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH**

TO: Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Rob Van Tassell, President and CEO, Catholic Charities Hawaii

**Hearing: Wednesday 02/15/2023; 1:00 PM; CR 225 & via videoconference**

Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of **SB 1351**, which establishes the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program within the Department of Health. I am Rob Van Tassell, with Catholic Charities Hawaii.

Catholic Charities Hawaii (CCH) is a tax exempt, non-profit agency that has been providing social services in Hawaii for over 75 years. CCH has programs serving children, families, elders, homeless, and immigrants. Our mission is to provide services and advocacy for the most vulnerable in Hawaii. Catholic Charities Hawaii has many years of experience providing a range of services to families with children age birth to five years old. Our staff was recently endorsed as an Infant Family Specialists by the Association of Infant Mental Health Hawaii.

Catholic Charities Hawaii supports the overall health and well-being of a person at any stage of life, this includes the mental health of infants and youth children. Research shows the critical importance of early parent-child relationships in a child's brain development, sense of self, ability to self-regulate, development of empathy, and ability to attune to others. The mental health of the infant and young child in the context of early relationships sets the foundation for health in all areas of development, and can result in later more costly social and academic consequences for unmet needs. Thus, infant and early childhood programs should not only screen for conditions placing young children at risk, but also provide a range of interventions designed to alleviate and reduce the long-term impacts toxic stress in the child and family.

Catholic Charities Hawaii supports this bill to establish and provide funding for the infant and early childhood mental health program. We feel this bill provides a comprehensive approach which includes developing and implementing flexible strategies for delivery of services, as well as creating workforce training to promote better understanding of the needs of infant and early childhood mental health. We urge your support for this bill and ask for your assistance in its passing during this legislative session.

Please contact our Director of Advocacy and Community Relations, Shellie Niles at (808) 527-4813 or [shellie.niles@catholiccharitieshawaii.org](mailto:shellie.niles@catholiccharitieshawaii.org) if you have any questions.



CLARENCE T. C. CHING CAMPUS • 1822 Ke'eaumoku Street, Honolulu, HI 96822  
Phone (808) 527-4813 • [shellie.niles@catholiccharitieshawaii.org](mailto:shellie.niles@catholiccharitieshawaii.org)





**SB-1351**

Submitted on: 2/11/2023 5:53:14 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Ranjah Jimeno	Testifying for Promising Minds	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

SUPPORT

**SB-1351**

Submitted on: 2/12/2023 2:21:51 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
nanci kreidman	Testifying for domestic violence action center	Support	Written Testimony Only

domestic violence action center

Comments:

Aloha,

thank you for supporting this important enhancement of community services to meet critical needs of babies and families.



*Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.*

To: Senator San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Aquino, Vice Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Re: SB1351, relating to infant and early childhood mental health  
1:00 p.m., Feb. 15, 2023

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and members of the committee:

On behalf of Hawai'i Children's Action Network (HCAN) Speaks!, mahalo for the opportunity to **testify in SUPPORT of Senate Bill 1351, relating to infant and early childhood mental health.**

Our brains develop most rapidly from birth to 5 years old, with the first three years being the most rapid of those. One of the most important components of successful development for our youngest keiki is that they have strong, nurturing relationships with adults in their lives—whether it be parents, caregivers or other providers. It's vital that we support children and those who care for them with a system that promotes healthy development and nurturing relationships.

The current system looks after infant and early childhood mental health through services given to each specific child. Thus, it can be difficult to take a system-level approach. A dedicated infant and early childhood mental health program in the Department of Health could help to support these existing efforts while expanding their impact by supporting parents, caregivers and other service providers in their ability to foster healthy and nurturing relationships while knowing when and where to get help for keiki.

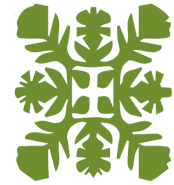
We especially look forward to the potential this program can bring **to enhancing and collaborating with existing programs and services for young children.** We believe an infant and early childhood mental health program should be an important complement to the various existing programs in the Family Health Services Division as well as the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Division.

**We urge you to advance this important measure.**

Mahalo,  
Ke'ōpū Reelitz  
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy



ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN THE STATE OF HAWAII  
**DIOCESE OF HONOLULU**  
Witness to Jesus



Online Submittal: February 13, 2023

**HEARING:** February 15, 2023

**TO:** Senate Committee on Health & Human Services  
Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Sen. Henry Aquino, Vice-Chair

**FROM:** Eva Andrade, Executive Director, Hawaii Catholic Conference

**POSITION:** Support for SB 1351 Relating to Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health

Honorable members of the Senate Health & Human Services, I am Eva Andrade, representing Bishop Larry Silva and the Hawaii Catholic Conference, the public policy voice for the Roman Catholic Church in the State of Hawaii. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support for SB 1351.

Trauma has a ripple effect, damaging families and relationships. Domestic violence, abuse and other traumatic experiences leaves children broken. Whenever that trauma is unaddressed, it increases the risk of mental health disorders, substance use, and chronic physical issues<sup>i</sup>. The keiki in Hawaii are one of our greatest assets and we must do everything we can to ensure their success and protection.

The Catholic Church recognizes the dignity of every person who lives with mental illness. As Pope St. John Paul II so beautifully said, "Christ took all suffering on himself, even mental illness. [...] whoever suffers from mental illness always bears God's image and likeness in himself, as does every human being. In addition, he always has the inalienable right not only to be considered as an image of God and therefore as a person, but also to be treated as such."<sup>ii</sup>

Establishing the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program within the Department of Health will not only help the children that need mental health services, but it will also help the community redefine our understanding of mental health, learn about various experiences of mental illness, consider the impact of early childhood trauma, explore the process of recovery, discover the importance of family and community support, and provide necessary resources.

Mahalo for the opportunity to provide written testimony in support of this measure.

---

<sup>i</sup> (July 20014) SAMHSA's Trauma and Justice Strategic Initiative (n.d.). *SAMHSA's Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach*. <https://www.samhsa.gov/>. Retrieved February 13, 2023, from <https://store.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/d7/priv/sma14-4884.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> (Rome, November 30, 1996). Pope St. John Paul II, "Address to Participants in the International Conference of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Healthcare Workers, On Illnesses of the Human Mind."

**HAWAII CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

(The public policy voice for the Roman Catholic Church in the State of Hawaii)



Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

---

Date: February 13, 2023

To: Senate Committee on Health and Human Services  
Chair, Senator Joy San Buenaventura

From: The Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawaii, dba AIMH HI

RE: Senate Bill 1351, Relating to The Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health System

Hearing: 02-15-23 1:00PM; Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this very important bill that intends to establish a system of infant and early childhood mental health consultation for children from birth to five years of age. My name is JoAnn Farnsworth, and I serve as the President of the Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health.

The Hawai'i Association for Infant Mental Health (dba AIMH HI) was founded in 2008 with the vision that *In Hawai'i the early years are celebrated and revered, first relationships are nurtured, and infant and early childhood mental health is everyone's kuleana.*

Our mission is to be *the go-to resource for sharing expertise and advancing practices that ensure Hawaii's youngest keiki grow up emotionally healthy and resilient.*

This bill presents an important opportunity to build a system of consultation, with the potential to create a comprehensive, developmentally appropriate mental health continuum that spans prevention to intervention, that will support not only the children of Hawai'i, but also the workforce that supports those children. There is a critical shortage of mental health services for children 0-5 and their families, and further, many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health. High quality consultation can not only increase the quality of existing programs but can also increase staff retention through the creation of a supportive environment.

As the Infant and Early Childhood system is built out, we strongly request the following elements be included as program components.

- 1) **The IECMHC system is competency-based.** It is not enough that a mental health consultant has a mental health license. Supporting such young children requires that the primary caregivers are integrated and considered, and as such, we recommend using nationally accepted competencies set forth by the Alliance for the Advancement of Infant Mental Health ([https://mi-aimh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-consultant-competencies\\_with-Alliance-Logo.pdf](https://mi-aimh.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/2016-consultant-competencies_with-Alliance-Logo.pdf)) and the Center for Excellence in Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (<https://www.iecmhc.org/documents/IECMHC-competencies.pdf>).
- 2) **Consultants are highly qualified.** To assure that consultants are developmentally appropriate, culturally sensitive, and specialized in supporting young children and their

Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i (AIMH HI)  
P.O. Box 235147, Honolulu, Hawai'i 96823  
[www.aimhhi.org](http://www.aimhhi.org)



Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawai'i

- families, consultants should be selected from the roster of vetted professionals who demonstrate competency in infant and early childhood mental health and consultation. This roster is managed and maintained by the Public and Private Rostering Body.
- 3) **Consultants are supported.** Consultants receive on going, Competency® based Reflective Supervision. Reflective Supervision will aid in retaining these highly qualified and specialized consultants in the profession.
  - 4) **Consultants are connected.** Consultants have access to and are part of a community of practice that is based in on going professional development and are reviewed annually by the Public and Private Rostering Body.
  - 5) **The field is supported.** There is an ongoing workforce development plan and commitment to investing in the growth, mentoring, and development of future IECMH consultants. IECMH Consultants which in turn support the retention of the overall IECMH workforce that is currently experiencing a critical shortage.
  - 6) **The system is a public-private partnership.** The Integrated Infant and Early Childhood Behavioral Health Plan (<https://earlylearning.hawaii.gov/hawaii-plans/hawaiis-integrated-infant-and-early-childhood-behavioral-health-iecbh-plan/>) began the work to coordinate efforts between public and private entities. We implore that this plan is referenced and utilized as a resource in developing the system, including the adoption of the definition of IECMH consultation:
    - a. *"IECMHC is a prevention-based approach that pairs a mental health consultant with adults who work with infants and young children in the different settings where they learn and grow, such as childcare, preschool, home visiting, early intervention, community programs and their home. Mental health consultation equips caregivers to facilitate children's healthy growth and development. It starts from the premise that all relationships in a child's life matter and works to promote both strong relationships and supportive environments for children, all of which are key to brain-building."*

AIMH HI will be happy to provide staff and committee members with justification and details of these requested program components.

In partnership with Hawai'i Community Foundation Promising Minds initiative AIMH HI has trained over 60 potential consultants in competency-based consultation.

SB 1351 will build on the work that is already under way to develop an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) Consultation model. Since 2022, Hawaii's IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team has been working with ZERO TO THREE and Georgetown University on a two-year project to build a sustainable, equitable, accessible statewide IECMH consultation system. The key components listed above are being further developed by the Team.

This cross-sector group of includes representatives of experts and early adopters in home visitation, early intervention, and early childhood care and learning settings. Members of this group come from philanthropy, mental health, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Executive Office of Early Learning, Head Start/Early Head Start, and other invested partners.



The creation of a IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health will be able to implement this team's work to ensure that Hawaii can effectively support the social-emotional and mental health needs of our youngest children.

AIMH HI respectfully requests that your committee acknowledge the hard work of the IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team as laying a foundation for the work to be undertaken by the new IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health created by this bill in your committee report. The new IECMH consultation program created by SB 1351 will be armed with a well-developed action plan that complements and augments existing plans, such as the Early Childhood State Plan, and can build on the work that is already underway.

**We thank you for your commitment to a high quality, competency-based system for infant and early childhood mental health consultation.** Thank you for this opportunity to testify and offer additional information about Governor Green's timely proposal to create an IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this exciting and necessary bill,

JoAnn Farnsworth, M.S.,IMH-E®  
Association for Infant Mental Health in Hawaii, President



**Parents And  
Children Together**

BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER MOST

**TO: Chair Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Members of the Senate Committee on Health and Human Services**

**FROM:** Ryan Kusumoto, President & CEO of Parents And Children Together (PACT)

**DATE/LOCATION:** February 15, 2023; 1:00 pm, Conference Room 225

**RE: TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF SB 1351 – RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH**

**We ask you to support SB1351 which** is Governor Green's bill to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) program in the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five.

It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under age 5 need mental health supports. Since 2018, the Promising Minds initiative and many partner organizations and funders across the state have been working together to expand young children's mental health supports and make them a full part of an inclusive mental health system. All this work is grounded in trauma-informed practices. The creation of a IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health will help to coordinate and address the social-emotional and mental health needs of our youngest children. There is a critical shortage of mental health services for children ages 0-5 and their families and many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health. Parents And Children Together has participated in Promising Minds and as a result our keiki and families have benefited from a collaborative approach to addressing this need. It results in the usage of culturally appropriate and evidenced-based approaches that are critical for different regions of this state. We are excited to see this work continue and grow through state investment.

In addition, since 2022, Hawaii's IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team has been working on a two-year project to build a sustainable, equitable and accessible IECMH consultation system. By December 2023, this Coordinating Team will develop a plan the new IECMH program in DOH could implement.

Founded in 1968, Parents And Children Together (PACT) is one of Hawaii's not-for-profit organizations providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 15,000 people across the state annually, PACT helps families identify, address, and successfully resolve challenges through its 20 programs. Among its services are: early education programs, domestic violence prevention and intervention programs, child abuse prevention and intervention programs, childhood sexual abuse supportive group services, child and adolescent behavioral health programs, sex trafficking intervention, poverty prevention and community building programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of SB 1351**, please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or [rkusumoto@pacthawaii.org](mailto:rkusumoto@pacthawaii.org) if you have any questions.



Feb. 14, 2023

To: Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair  
Senator Henry Aquino, Vice-Chair  
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

Subject: **Measure** – SB 1351 RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD  
MENTAL HEALTH  
**Hearing Date** – Feb. 15, 2023  
**Time** - 1:00 PM  
**Location** - Room 225

**This testimony is in support of SB 1351.**

My name is Dr. Terry Lock. I am with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM) College of Education (COE) and serve as the director of the Hawai'i Early Childhood Educator Excellence and Equity (ECE<sup>3</sup>) Project.

I have been working in the field of early care and education for over four decades in a variety of positions, including providing more support to the early care and education workforce on how to address the social-emotional and mental health needs of infants, toddlers, preschoolers, and early elementary grades.

Research has shown that childhood trauma is common. More than two thirds of children in the U.S. experience traumatic events or circumstances, such as abuse and neglect, death of loved one, and domestic or community violence by the time they turn 16 years old. Young children in particular are, disproportionately exposed to traumatic events and circumstances. It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under age 5 in Hawai'i need social-emotional and mental health supports.

Since 2018, the Promising Minds initiative and many partner organizations and funders across the state have been working together to expand young children's mental health supports and make them a full part of an inclusive mental health system.

However, there is a critical shortage of mental health services for children ages 0-5 and their families and many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health.

I am in support of establishing the Infant and Early Children Mental Health (IECMH) Program within the Department of Health (DOH) to provide and coordinate mental health services for young children.

This program will develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services, and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

**SB-1351**

Submitted on: 2/11/2023 5:36:14 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
jayne arasaki	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Jayne Arasaki from Rainbow Schools strongly supports SB 1351 Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. SB 1351 is Governor Green's bill to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) program in the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five.

It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under age 5 are in need of mental health supports. Since 2018, the Promising Minds initiative and many partner organizations and funders across the state have been working together to expand young children's mental health supports and make them a full part of an inclusive mental health system. All of this work is grounded in trauma-informed practices. The creation of a IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health will help to coordinate and address the social-emotional and mental health needs of our youngest children. There is a critical shortage of mental health services for children ages 0-5 and their families and many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health. Rainbow Schools has participated in Promising Minds and as a result our children and families have benefited with more resources and responsive staff. We are excited to see this work continue and grow through state investment.

In addition, since 2022, Hawaii's IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team has been working on a two-year project to build a sustainable, equitable and accessible IECMH consultation system. By December 2023, this Coordinating Team will develop a plan the new IECMH program in DOH could implement.

Mahalo for allowing me to testify on this important bill. I urge the Committee to move SB 1351 forward.

**SB-1351**

Submitted on: 2/13/2023 8:45:46 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lauren Whittlemore, LSW	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

**I strongly support SB 1351 Relating to Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health. SB 1351 is Governor Green's bill to create an Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health (IECMH) program in the Department of Health to provide and coordinate mental health services for children from birth to age five.**

**It is estimated that 29,000 keiki under age 5 are in need of mental health supports. Since 2018, the Promising Minds initiative and many partner organizations and funders across the state have been working together to expand young children's mental health supports and make them a full part of an inclusive mental health system. All of this work is grounded in trauma-informed practices. The creation of a IECMH consultation program in the Department of Health will help to coordinate and address the social-emotional and mental health needs of our youngest children. There is a critical shortage of mental health services for children ages 0-5 and their families and many sectors within the early childhood arena are struggling to fill staff vacancies for mental health. We are excited to see this work continue and grow through state investment.**

**In addition, since 2022, Hawaii's IECMH Consultation Technical Assistance Coordinating Team has been working on a two-year project to build a sustainable, equitable and accessible IECMH consultation system. By December 2023, this Coordinating Team will develop a plan the new IECMH program in DOH could implement.**

**Mahalo for allowing me to testify on this important bill. I urge the Committee to move SB 1351 forward.**

**Senate Health and Human Services Committee**

RE: SB1351, RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH.

Hearing Date: Tuesday, February 15, 2023

Time: 1:00 pm via Conference Room 225 & Videoconference

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and Members of the Committee:

My name is Kainoa Schubert, and I am a resident in the city of Hilo on Hawaii Island. Currently, I am in pursuit of obtaining my Master's degree in Social Work (BSW) through the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work at the University of Hawaii at Manoa. In addition, I am also employed as a Social Worker II at the East Hawaii Child Welfare Service office. I am testifying in support of bill number SB1351, as it “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, develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care.”

I feel very strongly about this for various reasons but considering the fact that many of my clients are between the ages of 0-5 years old, I have a vested interest in this subject. Many children that come through Child Welfare are babies or toddlers who have been born with drug addictions, especially those whose parents took drugs throughout their pregnancy or live in an environment where drugs is the lifestyle they have become accustomed to, where their infant or toddler is encompassed by this environment. The parents don't realize the impact that drugs and alcohol has on their unborn babies and into their young life. For many, it affects their mental capacity. In addition, it can also affect their physical being as well.

I believe that the Early Childhood Mental Health Program will aid in the infants developmental milestones and serve as the gateway to a broader range of services to meet the various types of needs the young babies have that may hinder their proper developmental function and instead, aid the caregivers in providing them with promising futures. In most cases, it would be ignorant to assume that a baby born addicted to drugs will develop the same as if they were not. That is because of the effect that drugs have on a baby that is still developing in

utero. Even after they are born, they are still developing and often are delayed in their developmental stages due to the imbalance that the drugs have inflicted on the infants brain.

During the four years that my husband and I served as Resource Caregivers, also known as Foster Parents, there were both babies and toddlers that came through our home, born addicted to drugs. The babies suffered tremors and meeting their developmental milestones such as reaching for a toy or object, talking, and properly sucking a bottle. In addition to developmental delays, the program can aid in addressing behavioral challenges, mood and anxiety disorders, trauma, and challenges with daily living skills. This is why I am in favor of passing bill number SB1351.

Thank you for your time,

Kainoa Schubert

Social Worker for the East Hawaii Child Welfare Service

MSW student at Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work

University of Hawaii at Manoa

[kschuber@hawaii.edu](mailto:kschuber@hawaii.edu)

[kschubert@dhs.hawaii.gov](mailto:kschubert@dhs.hawaii.gov)

**SB-1351**

Submitted on: 2/14/2023 1:00:07 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/15/2023 1:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Raya Esteban	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Aquino and committee members,

Please support SB 1351, which would establish the Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program within the Department of Health. As a previous early care educator, I understand the importance of ensuring children grow up in an environment with reduced adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), which research shows can have a tremendous impact on future violence victimization and perpetration, and lifelong health and opportunity. Children growing up with ACEs often undergo [toxic stress](#), which can cause temporary and even long-lasting changes on the human body response systems. The number one buffer to offset the potentially permanent effects of toxic stress is warm and trusting relationships with caregivers. Unfortunately, not all children have access to these quality relationships, even within their own families. That is why it is pivotal to provide and coordinate mental health services for children as early as birth, develop and implement flexible strategies for the delivery of services and workforce training, and promote better understanding of the needs of infants and young children, the importance of positive early relationships, and the benefits of trauma-informed care. From both a physical and mental health standpoint, we must start young to prevent future damage to our keiki's health and well-being later in life.

Please support this measure.

Mahalo,

Raya Esteban

**Written Testimony to the  
Senate Committee in support of SB 1351  
RELATING TO INFANT AND EARLY CHILDHOOD MENTAL HEALTH**

**Individual Testimony of Noel Akbar**

February 14, 2023

**LATE**

To the Distinguished Chairs of the Senate Committee:

My name is Noel Akbar and I am currently a Masters of Social Work student at the University of Hawai'i at Manoa Thompson School of Social Work with a specialization in Behavioural Mental Health and I will be testifying on behalf of myself. I appreciate the opportunity to testify in support of SB 1351, which would establish an early childhood mental health program within the department of health which will in turn provide leadership and coordination towards efforts in order to improve the quality of mental health services for young keiki and their families in our islands.

I support SB 1351 because of the long-term positive impact it will have on our communities. This bill will progress Hawai'i towards an improved trauma-informed care approach for the keiki in our islands. Trauma-informed care can be identified in 3 ways: realizing the prevalence of trauma in individuals and communities, recognizing how this trauma affects the individuals and communities, and putting the knowledge and understanding of trauma and its effects into services for those in need. Specifically in Hawai'i, we understand that due to socioeconomic inequalities, intergenerational trauma, and much more; keiki who are born into families experiencing such hardships are at a higher risk for experiencing trauma within their first few years of life. It is imperative that we provide the tools and resources necessary to combat such traumatic experiences for the keiki.

Before I attended the Thompson School of Social Work, I previously worked at an organization that provided support groups and training to resource caregivers (foster parents) on all our islands. My job was to organize and manage the childcare at said events. During this time, I was able to gain firsthand knowledge and experience of the thousands of keiki that are in our foster care system in Hawai'i. What I learned from working with the keiki and their families is that many of these keiki have experienced trauma from the day they were born. The trauma that many of them have experienced has negatively impacted their social development, emotional relationships, and ultimately their mental health for years.

If SB 1351 is passed, the state will have the opportunity to protect our keiki from re-traumatization, future incarceration, and lessen the need for mental health services in the future. I believe the Senate will support this bill for the betterment of our communities.

Thank you for your time.