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

16 Furthermore, the legislature finds that interventions at an
17 early stage of life can result in future cost savings for



1 special education, mental health treatment, juvenile justice,
2 and incarceration. The legislature further finds that parents,
3 pediatricians, home visitors, and child care providers can be
4 the first responders to mental health concerns. Identifying
5 problems early and intervening before they increase in severity
6 will provide the best chance of helping young children with
7 mental health needs succeed and lead healthy and happy lives.

8 Additionally, the legislature finds that unmet childhood
9 mental health needs were on the rise before the coronavirus
10 disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic and have since worsened. In a
11 preliminary study published by the Journal of the American
12 Medical Association, Columbia University researchers found that
13 compared to babies born just before the COVID-19 pandemic,
14 babies born during the first year of the pandemic scored lower
15 on a developmental screening test of social and motor skills at
16 six months regardless of whether their mothers contracted COVID-
17 19 during pregnancy. Other factors, including fewer play dates
18 and altered interactions with stressed caregivers, may help
19 explain why babies born during the pandemic have weaker social
20 and motor skills than babies born before the pandemic.



1 The legislature also finds that the COVID-19 pandemic and
2 its economic impacts have disproportionately affected groups
3 already experiencing disparities and inequities. Native
4 Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders do not have equitable access to
5 preventive care, services, and treatment to address physical and
6 mental health needs. These inequities contribute to family
7 stress, toxic stress, and adverse childhood experiences, and
8 perpetuate intergenerational and historical trauma.

9 The purpose of this Act is to create and appropriate funds
10 for an infant and early childhood mental health program in the
11 department of health, including one permanent full-time
12 equivalent (1.0 FTE) position.

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

16 "§321- **Infant and early childhood mental health**
17 **program; established.** (a) There is established within the
18 department of health the infant and early childhood mental
19 health program, to provide and support mental health services
20 for children from birth up to age five. The program shall focus
21 on providing children with the ability to:



1 (1) Form close and secure adult and peer relationships;

2 (2) Experience, manage, and express a full range of
3 emotions; and

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

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

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



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

3 SECTION 4. New statutory material is underscored.

4 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2050.



Report Title:

DOH; Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program;
Establishment; Positions; 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 up to age five. Appropriates funds for the establishment of the program, including one permanent full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) position. Effective 7/1/2050. (HD1)

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