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# 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 of experiencing future behavioral and academic  
15 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 Lauren C. Shuffrey et al., *Association of*  
18 *Birth During the COVID-19 Pandemic With Neurodevelopmental*  
19 *Status at 6 Months in Infants With and Without InUtero Exposure*  
20 *to Maternal SARS-CoV-2 Infection*, 176 JAMA Pediatr. (2022).  
21 Other factors, including fewer play dates and altered



1 interactions with stressed caregivers, may help explain why  
2 babies born during the pandemic have weaker social and motor  
3 skills than babies born before the pandemic.

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

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

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

19 "§321- Infant and early childhood mental health program;  
20 established. (a) There is established within the department of  
21 health the infant and early childhood mental health program,



1 which shall provide and support mental health services for  
2 children from birth to age five, so they can form close and  
3 secure adult and peer relationships; experience, manage, and  
4 express a full range of emotions; and explore the environment  
5 and learn, all in the context 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 \$800,000 or so much  
15 thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2023-2024 and the  
16 sum of \$1,700,000 or so much thereof as may be necessary for  
17 fiscal year 2024-2025 for the establishment and operations of  
18 the infant and early childhood mental health program, including  
19 the establishment of one permanent full-time time equivalent  
20 (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, 2023.



**Report Title:**

Department of Health; Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Program; Establishment; Positions; Appropriations

**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, 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. Appropriates funds for the establishment of the center, including one permanent full-time equivalent (1.0 FTE) position. (SD1)

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