

STATE OF HAWAII
Executive Office on Early Learning
2759 South King Street, Room C6
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96826

March 30, 2024

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

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

SUBJECT: Measure: G.M. No. 589 – SUBMITTING FOR CONSIDERATION AND CONFIRMATION TO THE EARLY LEARNING BOARD, GUBERNATORIAL NOMINEE, SULMA GANDHI, FOR A TERM TO EXPIRE 6-30-2027.
Hearing Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2024
Time: 3:01 pm
Location: Conference Room 229

EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING'S POSITION: Support

Aloha, I am Yuuko Arikawa-Cross, Director of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL). EOEL supports the nomination and confirmation of Dr. Sulma Gandhi to the Early Learning Board (ELB).

EOEL is statutorily responsible for the development and administration of the State's early learning system, which shall ensure a spectrum of high-quality early learning opportunities for children from prenatal care until the time they enter kindergarten, with priority given to underserved or at-risk children.

The ELB was established as a governing board through Act 202, Session Laws of Hawaii'i (SLH), Regular Session 2017, and is responsible for directing the EOEL on how best to meet the developmental and educational needs of children from prenatal care to entry into kindergarten; providing recommendations to the EOEL on improving the quality, availability, and coordination of early learning programs; promoting collaboration across agencies and stakeholders serving young children; and appointing and evaluating the EOEL director on an annual basis.

Dr. Gandhi has been nominated for an appointment to the ELB consistent with Hawai'i Revised Statutes (HRS) § 302L-1.6. Presently, Dr. Gandhi serves as the Hawai'i Health Program Officer for the Stupski Foundation and has extensive experience in providing direct services and leading initiatives that enhance the health, safety, and well-being of children and families across the State. Dr. Gandhi satisfies the requirements of HRS § 302L-1.65, which provides, in relevant part, that the ELB nominees shall demonstrate integrity, civic virtue, and high ethical standards and be willing to hold fellow members to the same; commit to being a conscientious and attentive board member; have an understanding of best practices in early learning governance or be willing to be trained in best practices in early learning governance; and have a clear understanding of the board's role in developing and protecting a clear, long-term strategic vision for early learning. As demonstrated by her resume offered in support of her nomination, Dr. Gandhi served in many capacities in the public and private sectors in the State and her experiences indicate a valuable ability to function among diverse colleagues as a member of an effective team and provides substantial support of her deep and abiding interest in early learning and the support of families and children across Hawai'i.

Dr. Gandhi's experience will add great value to the Early Learning Board. Thank you for your consideration of Dr. Gandhi's nomination and for the opportunity to testify in support.

Sulma Gandhi DrBA, MSc, BSc, CPCC

EDUCATION

Doctorate in Business Administration: Health Care Management and Leadership

Dissertation: An Evaluation Model for an Employee Wellness Program

Master of Science: Health Information Science

Dissertation: Taxonomy for Guidelines of Healthcare

Bachelor of Science: Major Biology, Minor Psychology

CERTIFICATES

Certified as a Professional Leadership Coach, CPCC designation

Certificate in Health Care Administration

Certified as a Suicide Prevention Trainer for: Connect, SafeTALK, QPR curriculums

Certificate in Title IX Investigation (ATIXA Association of Title IX Administrators)

Certified to administer the Nursing Child Assessment Teaching Scale (Parent-Child Interaction)

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Stupski Foundation Private Philanthropic Foundation

Private spend down foundation collaborating with community partners to invest all assets to make the greatest possible change in our communities today. The Foundation primarily funds organizations in San Francisco and Hawai'i that address food justice, post-secondary success, and health.

Hawai'i Health Program Officer, 2021 to present.

Leads collaborative partnerships focused on the critical areas of maximizing early brain development and improving serious illness care to enhance the quality of life for a thriving Hawai'i. Championing change in philanthropy by transforming how the Foundation funds through shifting and transforming power dynamics between grantees and philanthropy. Collaborate and partner with a variety of stakeholders that deepen relationships to inspire creativity and strategy. Focus on inclusiveness that elevates the grantee as expert; service orientation that shifts the grantee to the driver's seat, and equity mindset/network weaving that connects grantees with key partners and stakeholders to elevate their impact.

County of Hawai'i –Department of Research and Development

Local government. Mission: Imagine, invest in, and collaboratively create a sustainable, equitable and thriving Hawai'i.

Deputy Director, 2020 to 2021 Department Budget ~ \$15 million

Provides leadership to accomplish the vision of the Mayor. Oversees grant funding to the community in a variety of sectors. Responsible for 20+staff including economic development specialists and subject matter experts. Department focuses on data driven, innovative pilots and programs to nurture a sustainable, equitable, and resilient Hawai'i.

Key Accomplishments at the County of Hawai'i:

- Applied for and received \$3M from the Office of Minority of Health for health literacy and procured \$2.5M to the community.
- Coached and managed a team of 20 member staff in all areas of economic development: food, energy, health, workforce, tourism.
- Facilitated procurement and dissemination through an RFP process of \$1M in County funds to the community.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education

Subject Matter Expert, 2003 to Present - *Evaluate and comment on research, publications and programs. Participated in the detail review for the Department of Education, Office on Violence Against Women, Family Youth Services Bureau, Office for Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration.*

Sulma Gandhi

Executive Coach, Advocate, Facilitator, Trainer, Speaker, Executive Producer, Educator (2000-Present)

Navigating complex change processes by building safe containers, where trust and interconnection, with the foundation of diversity, equity and inclusion, can thrive in order to steward high impact, long term social change.

Provides support and service to non-profit, education and governmental organizations: Ceeds of Peace, One Shared Future, Early Childhood Action Strategy, SMALLIFY, Kupu, FQHC Bay Clinic, Department of Education, Vibrant Hawai'i, Child and Family Service.

Founder of Conscious Communities, an initiative that provides groundbreaking programs that empower individuals and organizations to practice collective responsibility towards eliminating violence in our communities.

University of Hawai'i at Hilo – State funded University – Campus Budget ~\$80 million

Director, Student Health & Wellness Programs, 2012 – 2017 Unit Budget: Approximately \$2 million

Provide a system of care, for UH Hilo and Hawai'i Community College 7,000 students, which integrates education and prevention efforts with medical and mental health services, programs, and activities. Serve as the inaugural Director and campus Public Health Officer for the program to mobilize services and professional staff. Responsible for 20+ staff including clinical mental health counselors, nurse practitioners, suicide prevention grant staff, office staff and student peer health educators. Member of the Chancellor Executive Council and the Division of Student Affairs Executive Team. Implemented over 130 prevention education programs with a total interaction of over 7,000.

Key Accomplishments at the University of Hawai'i at Hilo:

- Received internal, state and national funding for public health programming and staff development (~\$85K).
- Principal Investigator and Project Director for the Substance Abuse Mental Health Service Administration \$522K award. This program has trained over 1500 participants as suicide prevention gatekeepers with 60,000 interactions, developed protocol to respond to suicide death or attempt, and developed a sustainability committee with diverse campus constituents.
- Strategized and implemented annual staff retreats to build new unit (mission, vision, values, goals and team building).
- Developed a business plan to increase student health fees for the University system.
- Developed and instituted the Student Health Advisory Council with 6-8 student leaders to encourage ownership of programs.
- Recipient of the NASPA Region VI Innovative Program Award for program Men of Strength in November, 2013.
- Led creation of UH Hilo policy and procedures to comply with Title IX/VAWA legislation and provided training for constituents.
- Executed Agreement with the College of Pharmacy & Medical Services to provide pharmacy services and student experience.
- Co-Principal Investigator on a study to assess how stress impacts student achievement.
- Developed a short film to increase mental health help seeking behaviors for Pacific Islander male students for the Counseling Services department (Koster Award for Innovation – American College Health Association Foundation).
- Executive Producer for a short, inclusive educational film related to college age campus dating violence. Creating toolkit and training to share with other University campuses. Focuses on LGBTQI and multi-cultural diverse populations.

Kamehameha Schools – Hawai'i Campus - Private Non-Profit Education Organization (\$11 Billion in assets)
Kamehameha Schools' mission is to improve the capability and well-being of Hawaiians through education. The Schools operate an educational system serving over 6,900 students of Hawaiian ancestry at K-12 campuses on O'ahu, Maui and Hawai'i island, and at 31 preschool sites statewide.

Ka Pi'ina Support Team Member (3 year special project Human Resources), 2009 – 2012

Workforce Capacity Building Project: framework to improve the way the school recruits, retains, rewards their workforce.

Key Accomplishments:

- Implemented multiple opportunities to train educators on performance evaluation and elicit feedback on a reward based system.
- Member of State-wide committee to design educator evaluations utilizing the Danielson Framework with pay for performance.

Lead Faculty (Inaugural), Health and Wellness Career Academy, 2004 to 2010

Key Accomplishments:

- Developed and implemented Career Academy curriculum for six new courses; Instructed diverse student population.
- Led 250 student service-learning projects that resulted in scholarships, fellowships and awards for many students.
- Developed relationships with professionals in the community to bring hands-on up to date learning to the students.
- Nurtured students in their future career aspirations through job shadowing, mentoring, and one-on-one counseling.

Sulma Gandhi

Hospice of Hilo – Private Non-Profit, Hawai‘i Island - 40 employees and \$3 million annual budget
Private non-profit agency that provides support, comfort, interdisciplinary care to the terminally ill and their loved ones and provides education and grief counseling to the community at large.

Director, Clinical Operations, 2003 to 2004

Responsible for the day-to-day leadership and oversight of all aspects of the clinical care including staffing, planning, coordination, evaluation, and quality improvement. Responsible for maintenance of administrative and clinical policies and procedures, coordinating utilization review, performance improvement, and internal and external educational activities as they relate to the clinical competency of Hospice care.

Key Accomplishments:

- Oversaw supervision and evaluation of the 30 member clinical team (Team Manager, Registered Nurses, Medical Social Workers, Spiritual Counselor, Medical Records Clerk, Service Representative).
- Led, and held accountable for all clinical costs, staff productivity, overtime, on-call staff rotations.
- Developed, implemented, and evaluated a quality assurance plan; integrated findings into patient care activities.
- Determined staffing needs and patterns according to program requirements.
- Developed, implemented, and provided ongoing evaluation of the agency’s policies, procedures, and clinical care.

Turning Point for Families, Inc. – Private Non-Profit, Hawai‘i Island- 60 employees \$2 million annual budget
Private non-profit agency that provides emergency shelter, advocacy, information, referral and support for victims and children of family violence; provides psycho-educational groups for teens and perpetrators of domestic violence.

Director, Development and Public Relations, 2002 to 2003

Developed and managed an integrated fundraising system to achieve the organization’s capital and program goals through grant preparation, direct mail fundraising, personal, business and service club solicitations, foundations, federal/state sources, special events, and corporate giving. Produced all communication pieces including advertising, radio, Internet, TV, press releases, mailings and brochures. Assisted board of directors in fund development responsibilities.

Key Accomplishments:

- Prepared over 40 grant proposals to federal, state, foundation and service clubs; Secured over \$3 million in funding.
- Received Ford Foundation New Voices Fellowship Program for agency (15 out of 400 applicants chosen nationally).
- Attended and networked at community interagency meetings (homeless coalition, domestic violence interagency, leave a legacy).
- Prepared monthly newspaper press releases and educational pieces, radio and television public service announcements and act as the community liaison/coordinator for national USA Weekend magazine coverage, meetings, events, and grant site visits.
- Facilitated Consensus Model Strategic Planning Process at the 2-day staff retreat for 60 employees.
- Assisted the Hawai‘i Community Foundation Children’s Trust Fund grant review process.
- Created new programs, budgets and assessments in an on-going effort to increase services provided by the agency.

Kapi‘olani Medical Center – Child Protection Center – Hilo, Hawai‘i, Non-Profit medical system
Health care provider whose goal is to maximize the number of children returning to a safe home and prevent abuse.

Assistant Branch Administrator, 2002

Provided coordination, management, facilitation, and official state reporting of Child Welfare Service’s multidisciplinary (pediatrician, nurse, social worker, psychiatrist) case conferences; Managed East Hawai‘i office.

YWCA – Hawai‘i Healthy Start Program – Private Non-Profit, Hilo, Hawai‘i

A voluntary home-based intervention program designed to prevent child abuse and neglect by promoting child health and development in newborns of families at risk for poor child outcomes.

Quality and Development Director, 1999-2001

Grant writing, quarterly and annual funding reports, community needs assessments, program development, supervision and evaluation of two programs and staff (Child Development and Group Activities). Program promotion at the community, state and national level, coordination and implementation of annual staff training program, participation on the management team, and implementation of the quality assurance and improvement program.

Sulma Gandhi

Key Accomplishments at the YWCA:

- Organized 4-day Myers Briggs Type Indicator training retreat for staff.
- Developed and arranged for training to instruct supervisors & direct service staff on basic and advanced job skills required by Department of Health (included 30 hours of annual training per staff member and 160 hours of training upon initial employment).
- Composed, coordinated, and facilitated over 60 interviews. Introduced the group interview process.
- Presented prevention education at weekly group events with Healthy Start participants.
- Acted as a community liaison with agencies to promote the program by providing in-service training on programs offered.

SELECTED PRESENTATIONS

Presented 2023 at Grantmakers in Health national conference “Trust-Based Partnership with Community Health Centers in Hawai‘i.”
Presented 2023 at Grantmakers in Health national conference “Creating Equitable Care Systems: Medicaid Solutions.”
Presented 2021 at Hawai‘i Island Suicide Prevention Taskforce and Hawaii Leadership Forum “Mental Health during a Pandemic.”
Presented 2020 Various Conscious Communities workshops on Speaking to Young People about Relationships
Presented 2019 at Hilo Medical Center Residency program “Cultivating Violence Free Communities.”
Presented at the 2018 Institute for Violence, Abuse and Trauma Conference “inclusive, diverse, prevention education film.”
Presented at the 2016 Hawaii Island Women’s Leadership Forum “Give it to me, I’m Worth It – Gender Equity.”
Presented at the 2016 Annual SAMHSA meeting: “Sustainable Suicide Prevention Programming”
Presented at the 2014 NASPA (Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education) Alcohol, Other Drug Abuse and Violence Prevention Conference, San Diego: “Stand Strong Against Violence! – Integrated Campus Prevention Efforts.”
Presented at the 2014 Applied Learning Summit, Hawai‘i: “The Mechanics of Effectively Managing Service Projects.”
Presented at the 2013 Annual SAMHSA meeting: “Developing a Culturally Responsive Suicide Prevention Strategy.”
Presented at the 2000 National Healthy Families America Conference “Parent Education Learning Groups.”

COMMUNITY/CIVIC INVOLVEMENT

East Hawai‘i Suicide Prevention Task Force Member and community trainer (2012-Present)
Safe Spaces and Workplaces Torchbearer (2019-Present)
Hilo Medical Center Foundation Board Member (2016-2022)
Early Childhood Action Strategy Safe Families Team Member (2018-2021)
Governor appointment Commissioner for the Judicial Selection Commission (2020-2021)
Hawai‘i Says No More (to end domestic violence and sexual assault) – core team member (2015-2017)
Hawai‘i Island Women’s Leadership Forum Annual Conference Program Committee Member (2015-2017)
County of Hawai‘i Office of the Prosecuting Attorney, Sexual Violence Prevention Planning Group (2012-2017)
Governor appointment - Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Hawai‘i Service Area Board Member (2013-2016)
Turning Point for Families – Domestic Violence non-profit agency – Board Member (2004-2005)
Rotary Club of South Hilo member (served on various committees to assist with community development) (2001-2004)
YWCA of Hawai‘i Island Teen Court: Volunteer Adult Facilitator (2001-2002)

AWARDS

2014 Omidyar Fellow – Competitive selection to join the Hawai‘i Leadership Forum
2009 Chamber of Commerce’s Athena Award Recipient (international award sponsored in local communities for women’s leadership)

Senate Committee on Education

The Hon. Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
The Hon. Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair
The Hon. Senator Troy N. Hashimoto
The Hon. Senator Herbert M. "Tim" Richards, III
The Hon. Senator Kurt Fevella

Testimony Regarding Governor's Message 589
Relating to Early Learning Board Nomination
Submitted by Dr. Sulma Gandhi
April 3, 2024, 3:01 p.m., Room 229

Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Early Learning Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, SULMA GANDHI, for a term to expire 6-30-2027.

Chair Kidani and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

I want to thank Governor Green for nominating me. I am honored to be considered for this post.

Mahalo nui to colleagues that submitted letters on my behalf lending me their support and aloha.

I have been privileged to serve Hawai'i in various capacities for the past 25 years. My entire career has focused on the health and wellbeing of our community, and I am passionate about it. I have worked in various hospitals, hospice, and within diverse health and human service fields from child abuse and neglect, domestic violence, health education to infection control. As a leader in the health and human service industry recipient for the Chamber of Commerce Athena award, PBNs Hawai'i's Most Admired Leader and the National Philanthropy Day Community Leadership award, I am deeply honored to contribute to the health and welfare of our community, our families, and our keiki, and am humbled that this work has been recognized over the years by the

Chamber of Commerce, Pacific Business News, and the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

I will bring to the board a unique combination of over 25 years of health and human services non-profit experience, 8 years of experience in the university setting, 8 years with K-12 Education, community awareness, teaching experience, strong professional relationships with diverse community members, and administrative and management experience which included development and project implementation.

I have a Doctorate in Business with a focus in Health Care Management and Leadership. In addition to my Masters degree in Health Information Science and a Certificate in Health Care Administration, I have a multitude of education distinctions and certifications including leadership coaching.

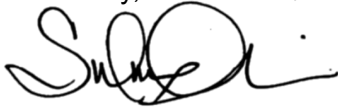
Quality early learning is vital to the fabric of our communities and with strong leadership we can build a more peaceful, just and humane world. I look forward to the opportunity to provide guidance and direction to EOEL that will impact the health, safety and learning for our keiki.

Personally, and what drives me, are my own keiki. I care deeply about the future of Hawai'i. I gave birth to twin babies as a high risk pregnancy on Hawai'i Island and understand the challenges of access to health care and early intervention to identify and support my own keiki through developmental milestones. They changed preschools three times within a year. I am privileged through education and network, certified and skilled in child development and I still struggled to find support and child care. They are now thriving public school attending students. I want our families to have better access and quality resources and opportunities than what I experienced.

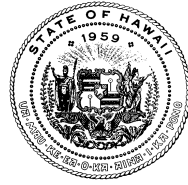
In closing, I would like to thank this Committee for the hard work you do for the State of Hawai'i and for considering this nomination. I look forward to working with you to build a stronger, more nurturing, and just community.

At this time, I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sulma Gandhi', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr. Sulma Gandhi



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
415 S. BERETANIA ST. #415
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**Testimony of Tia L.R. Hartsock
Director, Office of Wellness and Resilience**

**Senate Committee on Education
Wednesday, April 3, 2024, 3:01 p.m., State Capitol, Conference Room 229**

**G.M. No. 589, Submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Early Learning Board,
Gubernatorial Nominee, SULMA GANDHI, for a term to expire 06-30-2027**

Aloha Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members of the Committee:

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) in the Governor's Office **STRONGLY SUPPORTS G.M. No. 589** which is submitting for consideration and confirmation to the Early Learning Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, SULMA GANDHI, for a term to expire 06-30-2027.

The Early Learning Board is tasked with formulating statewide policy relating to early learning, and is responsible for: (1) directing the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) on how best to meet the developmental and educational needs of children, (2) providing recommendations to EOEL on improving the quality, availability, and coordination of early learning programs, (3) promoting collaboration across agencies and stakeholders serving young children; and (4) appointing the EOEL director and evaluating the director on an annual basis.

The Governor's nominee is well qualified to assist the Board with the above mandates. Dr. Gandhi has been instrumental in establishing collaborative partnerships in the fields of health, human service, and education with community-based and government organizations across Hawai'i. She deeply understands the critical importance of early brain development and the long-lasting impact it has on one's quality of life.

We appreciate the opportunity to express our strongest support for G.M. No. 589 to confirm the appointment of Sulma Gandhi to continue serving on the Early Learning Board.

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

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/1/2024 9:29:31 AM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
DOUGLASS S ADAMS	Testifying for County of Hawaii, Dept of Research & Development	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and Members of the Committee on Education:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in **STRONG SUPPORT** of the confirmation of the appointment of Dr. Sulma Gandhi to the Early Learning Board, the mission of which is to support children’s academic and lifelong well-being by directing and supporting the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) for an effective, coordinated, high quality early learning system from prenatal to kindergarten entry. Dr. Gandhi will be a highly collaborative and efficacious addition to the Early Learning Board.

I have greatly valued the opportunity to serve our Hawai‘i Island communities with Dr. Gandhi. As partners leading the County of Hawai‘i Department of Research and Development, I saw firsthand how she introduced community wellbeing resources into the county and modeled the characteristics of a compassionate and decisive leader of color for the members of our department, a legacy that continues to infuse our culture with trust, community empowerment, and the development of individual and collective potential. Her superlative efforts with the Stupski Foundation more recently have expanded her impact across the state, leading to an evolution of philanthropic funding that includes and empowers communities to catalyze their healthcare and community wellbeing opportunities. Her experience as an educator and children's care administrator has enabled her to immediately address the important issues the Early Learning Board has on its agenda.

Dr. Gandhi is wholly committed to her community and especially to the keiki of our island and our state. I enthusiastically encourage the Committee to send her confirmation to the Senate with a positive recommendation. Thank you for your consideration of her nomination.

very respectfully,

Douglass S. Adams

Director, Research and Development

County of Hawai‘i



COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

Date: Wednesday, April 3, 2024

Time: 3:01 PM

Place: Conference Room 229 & Videoconference

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF GM 589

Related to the Confirmation of the Early Learning Board, Gubernatorial Nominee, Sulma Gandhi

Honorable Chair Michelle N. Kidani, Vice Chair Donna Mercado Kim, and members of the committee:

Waimānalo Health Center (WHC) supports the gubernatorial nomination of Sulma Gandhi to the Early Learning Board for a term to expire June 30, 2027. As the Hawaii Health Program Officer for the Stupski Foundation, Sulma is a champion of families and communities, supporting their wellbeing and environments in which to thrive. She is a kind, genuine person that works to understand how to best support families and communities using their own strengths.

Sulma would be an outstanding member of the Early Learning Board, and WHC strongly supports her nomination. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Mary Frances Oneha, Chief Executive Officer



**Parents And
Children Together**

**BUILDING THE RELATIONSHIPS
THAT MATTER MOST**

ParentsAndChildrenTogether.org

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF GM 589

TO: Chair Kidani, Vice-Chair Kim, & Members
Senate Committee on Education
FROM: Ryan Kusumoto, President & CEO
DATE: April 3, 2024 at 3:01 PM

Parents and Children Together (PACT) supports GM 589, the gubernatorial nomination of Sulma Gandhi to the Early Learning Board. Sulma is a dedicated supporter of children's early learning in Hawaii, collaborating with PACT through organizations such as Commit to Keiki and the Early Childhood Action Strategy. Her current work for a foundation focused on offering timely assistance to families and individuals also aligns well with this role.

Founded in 1968, PACT is a statewide community-based organization providing a wide array of innovative and educational social services to families in need. Assisting more than 15,000 people across the state annually, we help identify, address, and successfully resolve challenges through our 20 programs. Among our 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. Please contact me at (808) 847-3285 or rkusumoto@pacthawaii.org if you have any questions.



KOKUA KALIHI VALLEY COMPREHENSIVE FAMILY SERVICES

2239 N. SCHOOL STREET ◆ HONOLULU, HAWAII 96819 ◆ TEL: 808-791-9400 ◆ FAX:
808-848-0979 ◆ www.kkv.net

Testimony on [GM589](#)

Submitted by David Derauf MD MPH
Kokua Kalihi Valley

March 1, 2024

Dear Members of the Committees on Education,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of Dr Sulma Gandhi to serve on the Early Learning Board..

I have known Dr. Gandhi for several years. She is thoughtful, considerate, intelligent, a good listener, capable of distilling diverse viewpoints carefully and with minimal bias.

She has extensive and diverse private and public work in the educational sector.

She will make a capable addition to this Board. I recommend her without reservation.

Please let me know if you need additional information

David D Derauf MD MPH

Providing Medical & Dental Services, Health Education, Family Planning, Perinatal, WIC and Social
Services to

Kalihi Valley residents since 1972. Neighbors being neighborly to neighbors.

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 10:53:19 AM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cheryl Vasconcellos	Testifying for Hana Health	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I would like to express my full support for the appointment of Dr. Sulma Gandhi to the Early Learning Board. Dr. Gandhi's work in the fields of health, human service and education with both community based and government organizations across Hawaii makes her an ideal candidate for this important role.

Dr. Gandhi's passion and commitment to building diverse, equitable and inclusive communities is always front and center of her work and is demonstrated by her current role with the Stupski Foundation.

Her record speaks for itself, and Sulma Gandhi has what it takes to make a difference in our community, our state and our world. Please confirm her appointment to the Early Learning Board.



April 2, 2024

Aloha,

My name is Rae Seitz, I am a palliative medicine specialist, educator and researcher. I am submitting this testimony in support of Dr. Sulma Gandhi's appointment to the state's Early Learning Board. Mahalo for this opportunity to do so.

I am the Chief Executive Officer of Hui Pohala, a non-profit local organization whose vision is for the people of Hawaii with serious illness to have access to high quality palliative care. Hui Pohala is launching an ambitious portfolio of projects aimed at supporting, expanding, and upskilling our healthcare workforce to enable the provision of high quality, team-based palliative care because in our estimation palliative care reflects the best care we can provide to those seriously ill.

I met Dr. Gandhi in 2022 when the Stupski Foundation generously funded an effort to understand the status of palliative care in Hawaii with special emphasis on our rural communities where health disparities were significant, resources most restrictive, and where healthcare outcomes were less than optimal. In this project we held extensive meetings with our neighbor island colleagues and representatives of healthcare organizations. Dr. Gandhi accompanied us to many of these meetings and attended preparatory as well as debriefing meetings with our team. During this time I found myself increasingly impressed with Dr. Gandhi's quiet attention to what was being expressed. She showed an ability to recognize almost immediately the most significant and impactful issues and concerns being raised. She skillfully incorporates the experiences of individuals into a broader context of a healthcare system which is complex and often delivers care that is uncoordinated, fractured, and ineffective. She was always looking for how the experiences we were learning about might illuminate a path forward to better care.

Dr. Gandhi lives her belief that all of us can and should find ways to support, teach, and learn together to ultimately create a tide that can truly lift all boats. She listens well. She expresses no ego. She celebrates the accomplishments of others. She is brave. She is welcoming and respectful. And she is scholarly, with a deep and very significant body of knowledge and experience about our political and social environment.



I am also a mom, a grandmother, and auntie to many keiki. I consider myself fairly well informed about the special needs of our kids and the improvements the state needs to make to ensure they are safe, educated, and allowed to grow into happy and productive human beings. I believe that Dr. Gandhi can be a significant contributor to this effort and support her appointment to the Early Learning Board wholeheartedly and without reservation.

Mahalo,

Rae S. Seitz, MD
CEO, Hui Pohala
rseitz@huipohala.org
5710 Haleola Street
Honolulu, HI 96821
(808)285-3102
www.huipohala.org



HUI POHALA

GM-589

Submitted on: 3/29/2024 12:37:19 PM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dan Tuttle	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Friday, March 29, 2024

State of Hawai‘i
Senate Committee on Education
State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Senators Kidani, Kim, Hashimoto, Richards and Fevella,

RE: Dr. Sulma Gandhi’s Nomination to the Early Learning Board

I am submitting this testimony as someone who has known Dr. Gandhi for two years as a colleague. From the beginning of our working relationship I have been impressed by her continual emphasis on centering the experiences of people impacted by a particular intervention or policy, and her ability to help others see and understand the realities of what life is like on Neighbor Islands. Her own experiences from raising boys in Hilo certainly influence that approach, which she also broadens through her extensive networks related to early health, early learning, and violence prevention statewide. It has been my privilege to get to know her and to be educated by her about how the state addresses the needs of its youngest keiki. She deeply cares about quality, access, and family choice and understands how important it is that state efforts take these into account, collaboratively with community. I could not think of a better candidate to represent and oversee the Executive Office of Early Learning.

Sincerely,

Dan Tuttle

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/1/2024 8:57:25 AM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emma Kern	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

4/1/2024

State of Hawaii

Senate Committee on Education

State Capitol

Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Senators Kidani, Kim, Hashimoto, Richards and Fevella,

RE: Dr. Sulma Gandhi's Nomination to the Early Learning Board

I am testifying in full support of Sulma Gandhi to serve on the Early Learning Board. I met Sulma through our work together in the non-profit sector, and I've come to know her as a fierce community advocate. Sulma leads with kindness, curiosity, and humility. I have no doubt she will take up her term on the Early Learning Board with the same values and commitment that she brings to all of her engagements.

Sincerely,

Emma Kern

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/1/2024 9:52:03 AM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Nicole A Velasco	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Writing in full SUPPORT of Ms. Gandhi for the Early Learning Board.

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/1/2024 11:59:12 AM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kelsie Okamura	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support Sulma Ghandi's appointment to the Early Learning Board.

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/1/2024 11:33:35 PM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Justina Acevedo-Cross	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Members of the Committee,

I am writing to wholeheartedly recommend Dr. Sulma Gandhi for the position of Early Learning Board member at-large.

Deep Understanding and Proven Experience:

For the past two years, I have had the privilege of working with Dr. Gandhi at the Stupski Foundation. As Program Officer, she co-founded and partnered with us at the Hawaii Community Foundation on the Promising Minds initiative in Hawaii. Her expertise shines through:

- **Early Childhood Expertise:** Dr. Gandhi possesses a deep understanding of the early childhood field, specifically early brain development. This scientific grounding, coupled with her knowledge of the unique context of Hawaii, makes her an invaluable asset.
- **Neighbor Island Focus:** Particularly noteworthy is her commitment to ensuring all children across the state have access to quality early learning opportunities. Her focus on the experiences of neighbor island residents strengthens the Board's ability to serve all of Hawaii.

Leadership and Collaboration:

Dr. Gandhi brings a wealth of experience beyond her work with the Stupski Foundation. Her 20-year career in human services, health, and education, spanning both county government and community-based organizations, equips her with the skills to:

- **Develop Leaders and Manage Change:** Her proven track record in leadership development and managing transformative projects will be crucial for the Board.
- **Strategic Thinking and Vision:** Dr. Gandhi demonstrates thoughtful and strategic thinking, possessing a clear vision for improving early learning, early health, and other vital childhood opportunities in our communities.

Advocacy and Passion:

Most importantly, Dr. Gandhi is a passionate advocate for children and families. Her dedication to ensuring all babies, toddlers, and preschoolers have the resources they need to thrive is evident in her work.

A Strong Asset to the Board:

I firmly believe Dr. Gandhi's qualifications, experience, and unwavering commitment makes her an ideal candidate for the Early Learning Board. She will undoubtedly make significant contributions towards achieving the Board's mission and ensuring a brighter future for all of Hawaii's youngest residents.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Justina Acevedo-Cross

March 31, 2024

Committee on Education
Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair
Members of the Education Committee,



O'ahu
(808) 733-5562
Hawai'i Island
(808) 935-0737

I am proud to speak in strong support for Dr. Sulma Gandhi brought forward in GM 589 today. I have known Sulma for over 20 years. Initially we met as fellow Rotarians. Her role in health and education endeavors qualify her for this position on Early Learning Board.

Sulma and I have both been privileged to have received the Athena Award from our Hawaii Island Chamber of Commerce. This brings us in contact with a tremendous group of women leaders not only on Hawaii island but across the United States. Ruth Bader Ginsberg was a past Athena recipient. Sulma has access to this network of leaders of this caliber when it assists programs she is involved in.

Sulma approaches everything she does with an attitude of willingness to work hard to accomplish the task at hand. She is very dedicated to our whole community but especially to the youth of our community. I am particularly impressed with the grace and humor Sulma brings when addressing a variety of cultures in her work. The entity she founded, called Conscious Communities offering empowerment to many individuals and entities alike. The work of this body is to teach all ages to responsibly eliminate violence and promote safety and respect across diverse environments.

Sulma's resume outlines far better than I can the accomplishments in her career and the personal and professional investment she takes in herself thus extending enhanced experiences to everyone she meets.

Please unanimously approve Dr. Sulma Gandhi's appointment for service on the Early Learning Board.

With Aloha,

Mary Begier, Realtor®

Referral & Relocation Certified / 1998 Aloha Aina Realtors Choice Award
Certified Residential Specialist / Certified Residential Broker
2001 Realtor® of the Year Hawaii Assoc. of Realtors®
2001 Realtor® of the Year Hawaii Island Board of Realtors®
2002 Realtor® of the Year Honolulu Board of Realtors®
2003 President Honolulu Board of Realtors®
2006-2013 Hawaii Island Commissioner Hawaii State Foundation on Culture & the Arts
2007 President Hawaii Island Board of Realtors®
2008-09 President Rotary Club of Hilo Bay
2009-2010 President Hawaii Island Chamber of Commerce
2010-2011 Chair Hawaii State Foundation on Culture & the Art
2013 Community Hero Award from Hawaii Invasive Species Council
2015 Hawaii Island Chamber Athena Award Recipient
2016-24 OEQC/EAC Advisory Member Hawaii Island
2022-25 HICC Chair of Military Affairs Committee
2022-25 NAR BOD Medium Board Representative

GM-589

Submitted on: 4/2/2024 2:57:24 PM

Testimony for EDU on 4/3/2024 3:01:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Ben Trevino	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I enthusiastically support Sulma Gandhi's confirmation to the Early Learning Board. Sulma is a community member that is committed to equity, high quality opportunities for all residents, and brings deep expertise in both learning and community activation. In this role, she will be an asset to the Board and the entire State of Hawaii.

Senate Committee on Education

The Honorable Senator Michelle Kidani, Chair

The Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

Testimony in Support of Governor's Message 589
Appointment of Dr. Sulma Gandhi
to the Early Learning Board

Aloha.

Serving her community is something Dr. Sulma Gandhi has enthusiastically embraced time and time again. For over twenty five years she's run toward the crises in our health system, offering not just her support but just as important offering innovative and community-oriented solutions.

Dr. Gandhi's work in fostering networks between public and private entities, and her steadfast commitment to addressing the rampant inequities in our community have earned her many awards and commendations. Yet the most important recognition has come from those who have seen her work and her dedication first hand, where she's viewed as a reliable and thoughtful partner to community-based organizations, and as an individual whose care for the community she calls home is matched only by the zeal and energy she brings to finding solutions that support a thriving Hawai'i.

Being called to serve one's community is not a challenge many people answer, but Dr. Gandhi has done so time and again. Without question, her work serves as a model for the development of partnerships and strategies that may be needed to support more robust and sustainable solutions for early learning initiatives for our keiki.

Best,

Matthew A. Nagato