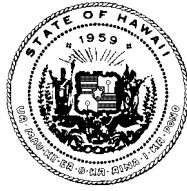


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February 5, 2024

To: The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2713 – RELATING TO ADOPTION ASSISTANCE**

Hearing: Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 9:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 329, State Capitol & Video Conference

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill and offers comments. DHS respectfully requests that any appropriation not reduce or replace a budget priority identified in the executive budget.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds to provide additional support and resources to families receiving benefits through the State's adoption assistance and permanency assistance programs.

DHS offers both pre- and post-permanency support services to all families statewide who are working towards permanency and attain permanency through reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship through Hawaii's child welfare system. Notably, permanency strengthening services are voluntary, and their status as voluntary is essential to respect the rights of the permanency family.

Once permanency is final, including cases of reunification, the rights of the parents are the same as those of all other legal parents; that is, Child Welfare Services (CWS) cannot require permanency parents to participate in permanency strengthening services. CWS only has the statutory authority to mandate services if there are concerns about child abuse and neglect per sections 350-1, 350-2, and Chapter 587A, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

The goals of the permanency strengthening services include family support designed to enhance child development, increase parents' competence in parenting, and strengthen parental relationships; family preservation services designed to help families at-risk or in crisis through the pre-placement preventative program to help children at risk of foster care placement remain safely with their parents; and adoption and legal guardianship promotion and support.

DHS appreciates the goals of increasing funds to support the needs of permanency families since the trauma that children and families have experienced can manifest and different points in life, sometimes years after the time CWS has stepped out of the family, and families require continued support. Additional funds may also support Family First Hawaii's expansion, which includes supporting and strengthening permanency families as a target population.

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