



MANPOWER AND
RESERVE AFFAIRS

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

1500 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-1500

March 18, 2025

Committee on Judiciary and Hawaiian Affairs
Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair
Representative Mahina Poepoe, Vice Chair

RE: Senate Bill 951 SD2 HD1 (Relating to Child Protection)

Dear Chair Tarnas, Vice Chair Poepoe, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the United States Department of Defense (DoD) and military families stationed in Hawai'i, I am writing to express strong support for the policy changes provided within SB 951 SD 2 HD 1. Currently, 35 states have enacted this policy and four states, including Hawai'i, have introduced bills this year to address this issue. This policy measure is particularly critical to DoD with nearly 26,000 minor children of over 42,000 active-duty military members stationed and living in Hawai'i.

DoD is required to establish the Family Advocacy Program (FAP) to address prevention of, and response to child abuse and neglect cases involving children in military families.¹ All major military installation FAPs offer wrap-around support for families at risk with a focus on prevention²:

- New Parent Support mentoring and training
- Relationship/Marriage counseling, Anger/conflict management, and Family Resiliency workshops
- Military One Source/Military Family Life Counselors: Non-medical Counseling
- Clinical Intervention including counseling and/or treatment
- Victim Advocacy for victims of domestic abuse and non-offending parents of child abuse or neglect victims

Federal law also requires all DoD covered professionals who are mandated reporters to report any suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect to military officials and FAP personnel, and to local authorities and child welfare services (CWS) offices, but with many active-duty military families living in communities located outside of military installations, combined by their frequent moves, incidences of child abuse and/or neglect may remain unknown to the military.

Each Military Service component has established policies to implement DoD policy directives on the response to child abuse and neglect, requiring that installation commands, military law enforcement, and the FAP coordinate with each other and with state and local CWS agencies and law enforcement, including requesting reciprocity of information-sharing requirements regarding instances of alleged child abuse or neglect involving members of the military³. Currently, there is no requirement for State and local CWS offices to notify military officials of allegations of child abuse and/or neglect or when an investigation involving a military family is being conducted; consequently, military families who are at-

¹ Code of Federal Regulations Title 32, Subtitle A, Chapter 1, Subchapter D, Part 61, "Family Advocacy Program"
<https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-32/subtitle-A/chapter-1/subchapter-D/part-61>.

² DoD Instruction 6400.01 "Family Advocacy Program (FAP)," <https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/DoDi/640001p.pdf>.

³ 10 U.S. Code 1787 "Reporting of child abuse," <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/details/USCODE-2011-title10/USCODE-2011-title10-subtitleA-partII-chap88-subchapI-sec1787>.

risk may not receive critical preventative and rehabilitative services that can be provided by the FAP during all stages of ongoing investigations.

The policy proposed within SB 951 SD2 HD1, if approved, would codify a reciprocal State requirement that will support the statutory responsibility of the military service components to report allegations of child abuse and neglect to the State, increase military families' access to prevention services, and facilitate better coordination of available state child welfare services and military preventative and rehabilitative services in support of military children and families. We have been in ongoing discussions with the Department of Human Services (DHS) and Deputy Attorney General (AG) to address potential implications of the measure and are satisfied that our collaboration has resulted in the current language that incorporates our respective requirements. We are committed to continued coordination with DHS and the AG's office to develop specific guidance on mutual policies, procedures, and responsibilities to ensure smooth implementation of the policy proposal.

The Defense Department truly appreciates Hawaii's steadfast support of our military service members and their families. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration and to the bill sponsors for their support of this important policy measure.

Sincerely,

Kelli May Douglas
Defense-State Liaison Office
DoD, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense,
Military Community & Family Policy

SB-951-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 10:54:55 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kathleen Chiarantona	U.S. Department of Defense	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Participating to support DoD representative testimony as the Subject Matter Expert for U.S. Department of Defense.

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Submitted on: 3/19/2025 1:37:13 PM

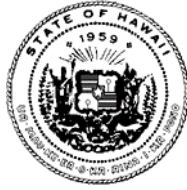
Testimony for JHA on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tammie Perreault	Department of Defense	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

A letter specific to SB951 will be submitted by the Pacific Southwest Liaison for your consideration. Respectfully requesting committee support for this policy.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
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 LAWE LAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 19, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative David A. Tarnas, Chair
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 951 SD2 HD1 – RELATING TO CHILD PROTECTION.**

Hearing: March 20, 2025, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 325 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure and offers comments.

PURPOSE: Requires mandatory reports of child abuse or neglect to include the military status of the child's parent or guardian, if known. Requires the Department of Human Services to inform the appropriate authority of the United States military when, upon receiving a report of child abuse or neglect, there is sufficient information to determine that the report involves a family where one of the parents, guardians, or alleged perpetrators is a member of an identifiable branch of the United States military. Effective 12/31/2050. (HD1)

DHS appreciates the multiple amendments to this measure. The Committees on Health and Human Services and Public Safety and Military Affairs (SD1) amended the measure by:

- (1) Deleting language that would have defined "director" to mean the Director of Human Services;
- (2) Clarifying that upon receiving a report of child abuse or neglect, if there is sufficient information to determine that the report involves a family where one of the parents, guardians, or alleged perpetrators is a member of an identifiable

- branch of the United States military, the Department of Human Services shall inform the appropriate authority for that branch of the military;
- (3) Deleting language that would have required the Director of Human Services to adopt or amend rules to authorize the disclosure to Department of Defense family advocacy groups any reported instances of child abuse or neglect involving a member of the United States military, as the Department of Human Services administrative rules already provide this authority;
 - (4) Inserting an effective date of December 31, 2050, to encourage further discussion; and
 - (5) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

The Committee on Judiciary (SD2) amended the measure by making a technical, nonsubstantive amendment for the purposes of clarity and consistency. The Committees on Human Services and Homelessness and Public Safety (HD1) amended the measure by:

- (1) Changing the effective date of section 2 of this measure to July 1, 2025, rather than June 30, 2025, to avoid potential technical issues made to certain statutory language as a result of Act 147, Session Laws of Hawaii 2024; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

The Committees on Human Services & Homelessness and Public Safety further noted that the Department of Human Services supports an effective date of January 1, 2026, for this measure.

DHS is committed to sharing information to ensure the safety of children with authorized entities, including the different branches of the military. This bill aligns with CWS's current practice of identifying, locating, and informing the appropriate military branch when a service member is involved in a child welfare report.

DHS, the Department of the Attorney General, and the Department of Defense continue to work on a Memorandum of Understanding with each of the branches of the military and anticipates that CWS will need time to train staff on forthcoming changes, if any.

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

SB-951-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/19/2025 12:59:27 PM

Testimony for JHA on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael Olderr	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

This is a no-brainer. Support our Keiki no matter who's keiki they may be.

SB-951-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2025 7:33:41 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire	Ohana Unity Party & Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

March 20, 2025

To the Honorable Members of the Hawaii State Legislature
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Esteemed Legislators,

I write with resolute support and a deep sense of urgency to champion Senate Bill No. 951 of the Thirty-Third Legislature, Regular Session of 2025, a vital measure to strengthen child protection in Hawaii. As a [resident of Hawaii/concerned citizen—customize as applicable], I am profoundly encouraged by this bill’s provisions to enhance reporting and coordination with military authorities in cases of child abuse and neglect. S.B. 951 addresses critical gaps in our system, and I urge you to pass it swiftly, holding accountable a framework that has too often failed our keiki—failures marked by the tragic deaths of children like Ariel Sellers, Peter “Peter Boy” Kema, and others.

This bill confronts a stark reality: our child welfare system must evolve to protect every child, including those in military families. By amending HRS § 350-1.1 to require reports of abuse or neglect to include the military status of a child’s parent or guardian, and mandating the Department of Human Services (DHS) to notify the appropriate military branch when sufficient information exists (HRS § 350-2), S.B. 951 ensures no child slips through jurisdictional cracks. With approximately 1.2 million school-aged military dependents worldwide, including tens of thousands in Department of Defense schools (Rounds et al., 2023), this coordination is essential. Hawaii, home to significant military bases, cannot afford oversight—especially when lives are at stake.

The need for accountability is undeniable, as evidenced by cases where systemic failures have led to tragedy:

- Ariel Sellers (2021): Six-year-old Ariel, adopted by Isaac and Lehua Kalua in Waimanalo, died after alleged abuse, including starvation and confinement in a dog cage. Despite multiple reports to DHS and warnings from her biological mother, Melanie Joseph, about prior abuse, the adoption proceeded, and Ariel vanished in 2021. DHS withheld detailed findings, citing privacy, even after her judicially confirmed death in 2023 (Civil Beat, 2023).
- Peter “Peter Boy” Kema (1997): Last seen alive at six, Peter died from septic shock due to untreated injuries, neglected by parents with a known abuse history. It took nearly 20 years for closure via a plea deal, revealing gaps in monitoring and intervention (Hawaii Children’s Action Network, 2015).
- Talia Williams (2005): Three-year-old Talia, a military dependent at Schofield Barracks, was beaten to death by her father. Despite prior abuse reports, systemic delays and poor coordination with military authorities failed her, prompting federal reforms too late to save her (Star-Advertiser, 2015).

These cases expose a pattern: inadequate reporting, poor interagency collaboration, and a lack of transparency have cost lives. S.B. 951’s requirement to share military status and notify relevant authorities bridges these gaps, ensuring military families—often transient and harder to track—receive the same vigilance. Its provision to disclose details in fatalities or near-fatalities (HRS § 350-2(h)) demands accountability, forcing DHS to reveal what went wrong, as it should have for Ariel, Peter, and Talia.

S.B. 951 is a step toward justice and prevention. It mandates police and DHS collaboration, ensuring all reports are acted upon (HRS § 350-2(b-d)), and maintains a central registry with expungement safeguards (HRS § 350-2(e)) to balance accuracy and fairness. For military-connected children, it aligns with federal calls for better tracking, as seen in the End Military-Connected Child Abuse and Neglect Act (Rounds et al., 2023), addressing the 1,383 U.S. child abuse deaths in 1991 alone (Congress.gov, S.596, 1993). Locally, with 1,458 confirmed abuse cases in Hawaii in 2015—46% involving Native Hawaiian or part-Hawaiian children (Hawaii Databook, 2015)—this bill is a moral imperative.

I urge you to pass S.B. 951 upon its effective date of June 30, 2025, rejecting the distant 2050 timeline. Ariel, Peter, and Talia deserved better—their deaths indict a system that failed to act. This bill honors them by demanding accountability and protecting the living. I stand ready to testify or assist in any capacity to see this through. Mahalo nui loa for your leadership—let’s ensure no more children pay the price of our silence.

Sincerely,

Master Shelby "Pikachu" Billionaire, HRM

Ohana Unity Party, Chairman

www.Ohanaunityparty.com

Kingdom of The Hawaiian Islands, H.I.

SB-951-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/20/2025 9:48:45 AM

Testimony for JHA on 3/20/2025 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Dara Carlin, M.A.	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Stand in Support