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KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
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TRISTA SPEER
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February 1, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1801 - RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.**

Hearing: February 3, 2026, 09:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

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

This bill appropriates funds for DHS to contract with one or more organizations specializing in domestic violence to provide training and on-site staff in Child Welfare Services Branch offices to support all aspects of screening for and addressing domestic violence within a case.

DHS appreciates the additional resources to address domestic violence and requests clarification on the scope of services the Legislature envisions that will be in addition to, or may enhance, the current array of Child Welfare Services Branch (CWSB) domestic violence training and contracted services. CWSB will need time to consult with the Department of the Attorney General and Branch offices on strategies to integrate additional services and to finalize protocols and administrative issues to facilitate on-site contractors across all Branch offices throughout the State.

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



February 3, 2026

Members of the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness:

Chair Lisa Marten
Vice Chair Ikaika Olds
Rep. Terez Amato
Rep. Daisy Hartsfield
Rep. Sue L. Keohokapy-Lee Loy
Rep. Gregg Takayama
Rep. Jenna Takenouchi
Rep. David Alcos III
Rep. Diamond Garcia

Re: HB1801 Relating to Child Welfare Services

Dear Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness:

The Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (HSCADV) mission is to unite Hawai'i to end all forms of domestic violence. We are a statewide partnership of domestic violence programs and shelters.

On behalf of HSCADV and our 20 member programs statewide, I respectfully submit testimony in strong support of HB1801 and applaud the legislature for addressing the experience of survivors of domestic violence who are involved in the Child Welfare System (CWS).

As HB1801 moves forward, it is important that training under Initiative #1 go beyond simply ensuring a good intake process and instead help staff understand **which situations are most dangerous**. This means using **evidence-based screening tools and evidence-based risk assessments**, which are not the same thing. Screenings help identify whether domestic violence may be present, while assessments look more closely at **lethality factors and the risk of serious or fatal harm**. Training that clearly teaches this difference will help CWS staff make better decisions, improve safety planning, and better protect survivors and their children.

Training that integrates these elements and explores effective practice at the intersection of domestic violence and child welfare will strengthen decision-making, improve safety planning, and better protect families involved in CWS.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important matter.

Sincerely,
Angelina Mercado, Executive Director



To: Chair Lisa Marten and Members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

From: Venus Kau‘iokawēkiu Rosete-Medeiros, President & CEO, Hale Kipa

Former Co-Chair, Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group

Re: Testimony in Strong Support of HB 1801 – Relating to Child Welfare Services

Aloha Chair Marten and Members of the Committee,

I am writing in strong support of HB 1801. I submit this testimony in two capacities: as the President and CEO of Hale Kipa, a nonprofit that has served vulnerable youth and families in Hawai‘i for over 55 years, and as the former Co-Chair of the Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group, established to reimagine a more humane, trauma-informed child welfare system for our state.

HB 1801 matters deeply to me because it reflects what we heard again and again from families, youth, and frontline providers across Hawai‘i: **our child welfare system too often responds to crisis without fully understanding the presence and impact of domestic violence.** When that happens, the very system meant to protect children can unintentionally cause further harm.

What We See at Hale Kipa

At Hale Kipa, we work with youth every day who have lived through violence, instability, and profound loss of trust in systems. Many of the young people in our shelters and transitional programs come from homes where domestic violence was present long before Child Welfare Services became involved.

I have sat with youth who told us they were removed from their homes without ever understanding why. I have listened to young people describe watching their mothers being hurt, only to later feel blamed or punished themselves. Too often, survivors, especially mothers, are treated as risks rather than as people in need of protection and support.

These experiences are not anomalies. They are patterns. And they align closely with what we heard through the Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group.

Lessons from the Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group

The Mālama ‘Ohana Working Group brought together individuals with lived experience, including former foster youth, birth parents, survivors of domestic violence, and community providers. Over more than a year of deep listening, one message was clear: **domestic violence is frequently present in child welfare cases, yet systems are not consistently equipped to identify it early, assess it accurately, or respond in ways that prioritize safety and healing.**

Families told us they were afraid to ask for help because they feared losing their children. Survivors shared that their abuse was minimized or misunderstood. Youth described feeling invisible in decisions that would shape the rest of their lives.

HB 1801 directly responds to these realities. It takes the working group's recommendations out of a report and into action.

Why HB 1801 Is So Important

This bill is not about adding another layer of bureaucracy. It is about **getting the response right when the stakes are highest.**

By requiring role-specific domestic violence training, HB 1801 acknowledges that intake workers, case managers, assessors, and permanency staff all encounter domestic violence differently and need tools tailored to their responsibilities.

By establishing domestic violence case tracking, the bill recognizes that we cannot fix what we do not measure. Right now, families experiencing domestic violence often feel unseen within the system. Data matters not to reduce people to numbers, but to ensure accountability, learning, and improvement.

And by supporting on-site domestic violence expertise within Child Welfare Services, HB 1801 moves us closer to real-time collaboration, where decisions about safety and permanency are informed by professionals who understand the dynamics of power, control, and trauma.

A Moment That Requires Leadership

This bill comes forward at a time when community-based organizations are already stretched thin—facing workforce shortages, rising insurance costs, and reductions in federal funding. Despite these challenges, our organizations continue to show up for Hawai‘i’s children and families every day.

HB 1801 represents a thoughtful, grounded investment in doing better—not by placing blame, but by building capacity, partnership, and shared understanding across systems.

Closing

As someone who has worked both inside the child welfare system and alongside families impacted by it, I believe deeply that **we can protect children without punishing survivors, and we can strengthen families without sacrificing safety.** HB 1801 moves us closer to that vision.

I respectfully urge the Committee to pass HB 1801 and continue advancing reforms that center the voices, safety, and dignity of Hawai‘i’s children and families.

Mahalo nui for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your continued commitment to the well-being of our keiki.

Me ka ha‘aha‘a,



Venus Kau‘iokawēkiu Rosete-Medeiros
President & CEO, Hale Kipa

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January 30, 2026

Testimony in Support of HB 1801 Relating to Child Welfare Services

As a community advocate and the former Executive Director of Hawaii Youth Services Network, I strongly support HB 1801.

This bill will enable Child Welfare Services to improve how it screens for and addresses domestic violence in cases involving children and families. This initiative stems from recommendations made by the Malama Ohana working Group, which identified the need to better support families experiencing domestic violence and to help child welfare workers distinguish between parents who cooperate with the system and those who might misuse it. The funding will support specialized training for child welfare staff on identifying and managing domestic violence cases, and will also provide access to domestic violence specialists who can offer consultation and support directly within the child welfare offices, thereby enhancing the system's ability to investigate domestic violence and assist affected families.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Judith F. Clark, MPH

HB-1801

Submitted on: 2/2/2026 6:23:29 AM
Testimony for HSH on 2/3/2026 9:00:00 AM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|----------------|--------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Jennifer Chiwa | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Representative Marten, Vice Chair Representative Olds and Members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness.

Please support HB 1801, and thank you, Chair Representative Marten for introducing this bill. To my understanding, this bill would assist Child Welfare Services to address and handle various aspects of domestic violence in a case. This assistance should be helpful to the children and parents involved.

Mahalo.

Jennifer Chiwa

Makiki and life long resident of Oahu