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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the malama ohana  
2 working group established by Act 86, Session Laws of Hawaii  
3 2023, was tasked with recommending transformative changes to the  
4 State's existing child welfare system. For fifteen months, the  
5 seventeen working group members, who represented those serving  
6 youth, as well as youth and families throughout the State,  
7 together with hundreds of community members, opened their hearts  
8 and listened deeply to the stories of lived experience in the  
9 child welfare system. They developed recommendations to  
10 establish a child welfare system that is trauma-informed,  
11 sustains a community-based partnership, and responds to the  
12 needs of children and families in the system and the community.  
13 The result of this work was a powerful vision for transforming  
14 how Hawaii supports families and protects children.

15 Among the many recommendations to move toward this vision  
16 was to strengthen the family court process for child welfare  
17 cases. This would include reducing delays in court proceedings,



1 using specialty courts where applicable, and ensuring access to  
2 excellent legal representation for relatives of youth in the  
3 system as well as for the youth themselves. Some youth reported  
4 feeling they were given no information about their case and  
5 their family and that they were left out of the decision-making  
6 process. They claimed they were disregarded when they reported  
7 that they were unsafe and did not feel their rights were  
8 protected.

9 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to establish and  
10 appropriate funds for a working group to improve family court  
11 processes, including access to legal representation for youth in  
12 the child welfare system.

13 SECTION 2. (a) There is established within the judiciary  
14 for administrative purposes a working group for legal services  
15 for youth in the child welfare system.

16 (b) The working group shall:

17 (1) Review and consider pathways for implementation of  
18 recommendations of the malama ohana working group,  
19 established pursuant to Act 86, Session Laws of Hawaii  
20 2023, as the recommendations relate to the court  
21 process, including counsel for youth; and



- 1           (2) Examine practices in other jurisdictions that provide  
2           different forms of legal services for foster youth and  
3           have one or more members conduct at least one site  
4           visit to selected jurisdictions in one or more states  
5           to identify possible practices to implement in the  
6           State.
- 7           (c) The working group shall be comprised of the following  
8 members:
- 9           (1) One district family court judge of the first circuit  
10           and one district family court judge from any other  
11           circuit, who shall serve as co-chairs and invite the  
12           additional members to participate in the working group;
- 13           (2) A supreme court justice or the justice's designee;
- 14           (3) Members of the judiciary who served or currently serve  
15           on the child welfare court calendar;
- 16           (4) A representative from the family law division of the  
17           department of the attorney general;
- 18           (5) A representative from the department of human services  
19           child welfare services branch;
- 20           (6) A representative from the William S. Richardson school  
21           of law at the university of Hawaii at Manoa;



- 1 (7) A representative from the HI H.O.P.E.S. Youth  
2 Leadership Boards of the HI H.O.P.E.S. Initiative  
3 under EPIC 'Ohana, Inc.;
- 4 (8) Three or more individuals with lived expertise in  
5 navigating the state child welfare system while  
6 minors;
- 7 (9) A parent with lived experience in the state child  
8 welfare system; and
- 9 (10) Other persons invited by the co-chairs of the working  
10 group who the co-chairs believe will effectively  
11 assist in fulfilling the working group's duties  
12 pursuant to subsection (b).
- 13 (d) The working group shall submit a report of its  
14 findings and recommendations, including any proposed  
15 legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior  
16 to the convening of the regular session of 2028. The report  
17 shall include plans for a pilot program to test a model for  
18 delivering counsel services to youth of a selected age range in  
19 a selected jurisdiction within the State.
- 20 (e) The working group shall cease to exist on June 30,  
21 2028.



1 SECTION 3. There is appropriated out of the general  
2 revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$ or so  
3 much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 2026-2027 for  
4 the working group established pursuant to this Act, including  
5 for the members of the working group to make site visits and to  
6 assist with the report drafting.

7 The sum appropriated shall be expended by the judiciary for  
8 the purposes of this Act.

9 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 3000.



**Report Title:**

Keiki Caucus; Judiciary; Child Welfare System; Legal Services for Youth; Working Group; Appropriation

**Description:**

Establishes a working group within the Judiciary to improve family court processes, including access to legal representation for youth in the child welfare system. Appropriates funds for the working group. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*

