

MAR 10 2026

SENATE RESOLUTION

REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO CONDUCT A STUDY
ON THE COSTS AND BENEFITS OF CREATING AN OFFICE OF THE
CHILD ADVOCATE.

1 WHEREAS, repeated instances of tragic child abuse cases
2 have exposed critical flaws within the State's child welfare
3 system, including the administration of foster services; and
4

5 WHEREAS, in 2019, the State agreed to pay \$585,000 to
6 settle a lawsuit brought on behalf of two children who were
7 abused by their foster parent; and
8

9 WHEREAS, in 2024, the State agreed to pay \$750,000 to
10 settle a lawsuit brought by the parents of a child who died
11 while in the custody of foster parents; and
12

13 WHEREAS, in 2024, a circuit court judge ruled that the
14 State was grossly negligent for placing an eight-year-old boy in
15 a foster home where the boy was abused; and
16

17 WHEREAS, a 2025 investigative series published by Civil
18 Beat reported that some of the nearly sixty boys who were placed
19 under the care of, and abused by, a single foster parent in the
20 1990s and 2000s experienced long-term adverse outcomes,
21 including substance abuse, homelessness, criminal justice
22 involvement, and significant mental health challenges later in
23 life; and
24

25 WHEREAS, in *Audit of the Department of Human Services'*
26 *Child Welfare Services Branch*, Report No. 24-05, State of
27 Hawaii, April 2024, the Auditor found that the Department of
28 Human Services' Child Welfare Services Branch failed to comply
29 with statutory licensing requirements, placing children at risk
30 and reducing federal Title IV-E reimbursements for foster care
31 services; and
32

33 WHEREAS, abuse within the State's foster care system caused
34 by lack of oversight and improper licensing has resulted in



1 substantial financial costs to the State through lawsuits and
2 lost funds; and

3
4 WHEREAS, Act 86, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023, established
5 the Malama Ohana Working Group to seek, design, and recommend
6 transformative changes to the State's existing child welfare
7 system; and

8
9 WHEREAS, in its 2024 report, the Malama Ohana Working Group
10 highlighted the need for responsive oversight of both systemic
11 and individual concerns in the State's child welfare system; and

12
13 WHEREAS, establishing an Office of the Child Advocate in
14 the State would provide impartial oversight of the delivery of
15 services to children and their families by state agencies,
16 including the Department of Human Services and its Child Welfare
17 Services Branch, and other entities that serve children and
18 their families through funds provided by the State; and

19
20 WHEREAS, an Office of the Child Advocate would provide
21 oversight through site visits to facilities that serve children,
22 investigation of complaints, periodic review of internal records
23 and procedures to ensure compliance with applicable laws,
24 issuance of annual reports with findings and recommendations,
25 including proposed legislation, and outreach programs to educate
26 the public; and

27
28 WHEREAS, the external oversight and recommendations
29 provided by an Office of the Child Advocate would increase
30 accountability across the State's child welfare system and lead
31 to greater protection of children from preventable harm,
32 maximize the State's federal funding opportunities, reduce
33 costly lawsuit settlements, and restore public confidence in the
34 State's child welfare system; now, therefore,

35
36 BE IT RESOLVED by the Senate of the Thirty-third
37 Legislature of the State of Hawaii, Regular Session of 2026,
38 that the Department of Human Services is requested to conduct a
39 study on the costs and benefits of creating an Office of the
40 Child Advocate; and



