

STAND. COM. REP. NO. 2501

Honolulu, Hawaii

FEB 20 2026

RE: S.B. No. 2678
S.D. 1

Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi
President of the Senate
Thirty-Third State Legislature
Regular Session of 2026
State of Hawaii

Sir:

Your Committee on Judiciary, to which was referred S.B. No. 2678 entitled:

"A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO CHILD WELFARE SERVICES,"

begs leave to report as follows:

The purpose and intent of this measure is to:

- (1) Establish a working group within the Judiciary to improve family court processes, including access to legal representation for youth in the child welfare system; and
- (2) Appropriate funds for the working group.

Your Committee received testimony in support of this measure from the Judiciary, Office of Wellness and Resilience, EPIC 'Ohana, National Center for Youth Law, Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, National Association of Counsel for Children, HI H.O.P.E.S Initiative, and seventeen individuals.

Your Committee received comments on this measure from the Department of the Attorney General.

Your Committee finds that the Mālama 'Ohana Working Group found that individuals with lived experiences in foster care shared that they often faced life-altering decisions without legal



guidance or an advocate to ensure that their needs were acknowledged. Research indicates that providing legal representation to young people in foster care empowers them to understand their rights and participate meaningfully in court proceedings. Providing young people in the child welfare system with legal representation leads to more positive outcomes that often culminate in permanency through reunification or adoption, greater placement stability, and better access to needed services. This measure will center the voices and lived experiences of children and families most affected by the Child Welfare Services System to strengthen the family court process for child welfare cases.

Your Committee has amended this measure by:

- (1) Specifying that a member of the working group shall be a representative who formerly served as a guardian ad litem;
- (2) Clarifying that three or more members of the working group shall be individuals with lived experience in navigating the state child welfare system while minors;
- (3) Inserting language authorizing the co-chairs of the working group to invite additional members with needed expertise;
- (4) Inserting language to compensate members of the working group with lived experience in navigating the state child welfare system; and
- (5) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency.

Your Committee notes that this measure contains an unspecified appropriation amount. Should your Committee on Ways and Means choose to deliberate on this measure, your Committee respectfully requests that it consider an appropriation amount of \$20,000.

As affirmed by the record of votes of the members of your Committee on Judiciary that is attached to this report, your Committee is in accord with the intent and purpose of S.B.



No. 2678, as amended herein, and recommends that it pass Second Reading in the form attached hereto as S.B. No. 2678, S.D. 1, and be referred to your Committee on Ways and Means.

Respectfully submitted on
behalf of the members of the
Committee on Judiciary,



KARL RHOADS, Chair



The Senate
Thirty-Third Legislature
State of Hawai'i

Record of Votes
Committee on Judiciary
JDC

Bill / Resolution No.:* SB 2674	Committee Referral: JDC, WAM	Date: 2/12/26		
<input type="checkbox"/> The Committee is reconsidering its previous decision on this measure. If so, then the previous decision was to: _____				
The Recommendation is: <input type="checkbox"/> Pass, unamended 2312 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pass, with amendments 2311 <input type="checkbox"/> Hold 2310 <input type="checkbox"/> Recommit 2313				
Members	Aye	Aye (WR)	Nay	Excused
RHOADS, Karl (C)	✓			
GABBARD, Mike (VC)	✓			
CHANG, Stanley				✓
SAN BUENAVENTURA, Joy A.				✓
AWA, Brenton	✓			
TOTAL	3	—	—	2
Recommendation: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Adopted <input type="checkbox"/> Not Adopted				
Chair or Designee's Signature: 				
Distribution: Original Yellow Pink File with Committee Report Committee Drafting Agency				

*Only one measure per Record of Votes