



STATE OF HAWAII
OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE
KE KE'ENA KŪPA'A MAULI OLA
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
415 S.BERETANIA ST. #415
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**Testimony on S.B. 2861 SD2
RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE**

Representative Lisa Marten, Chair
Representative Ikaika Olds, Vice Chair
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

March 24 , 2026, at 10:00 a.m.; Room Number: 329

The Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR) supports S.B. 2861 SD2 and requests amendments.

S.B. 2861 SD2 requires the OWR to develop a comprehensive plan for the establishment of a kakou pilot program to support families and children in need. To ensure the program can be developed effectively and in alignment with the mandates outlined in the measure, OWR respectfully requests the amendments that are attached to this testimony. In summary, the requested amendments are to clarify OWR's planning and advisory role, recognize Department of Human Services (DHS) as a key collaboration partner, and incorporate federal compliance safeguards.

Given the State's current fiscal climate, in which resources must be carefully stewarded, the OWR deeply appreciates the bill's intent to leverage available federal funds to support Hawai'i's families and keiki. The OWR respectfully defers to DHS's Benefit, Employment and Support Services Division (BESSD) regarding the eligible use of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds.

Mahalo for the opportunity to testify.

Tia L.R. Hartsock, MSW, MSCJA
Director, Office of Wellness & Resilience

A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE.

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

1 SECTION 1. The legislature finds that the State has
2 accumulated an estimated \$470,000,000 in unspent temporary
3 assistance for needy families program funding with approximately
4 \$333,000,000 in encumbrances on that funding. These moneys are
5 required to be spent on needy families that meet the eligibility
6 requirements of the temporary assistance for needy families
7 program.

8 Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to require the
9 office of wellness and resilience, *in consultation with the*
10 *department of human services* to develop a comprehensive
11 plan for the establishment of a kakou pilot program to support
12 families and children in need.

13 SECTION 2. (a) There is established within the office of
14 wellness and resilience the responsibility to develop a
15 comprehensive plan for the establishment of a kakou pilot
16 program to support families and children in need.

17 (b) For the purposes of the kakou pilot program, the
18 office of wellness and resilience shall create a plan to:

- 1 (1) Provide or arrange for the provision of services
2 for children in need, including child wellness visits;
- 3 (2) Distribute food boxes to eligible families, as needed;
- 4 (3) Provide counseling and related support services to
5 eligible families with a focus on families exiting a
6 foster family placement;
- 7 (4) Administer trauma-informed care services to ~~eligible~~
8 ~~vulnerable~~ families and children at risk of ~~in danger of~~
9 neglect; and
- 10 (5) Provide any other related services to support families
11 and children in need in accordance with this Act.
- 12 (c) The office of wellness and resilience may adopt
13 policies and procedures necessary to ~~develop the plan for implement~~
14 the kakou pilot program and to carry out the purposes of this Act.
- 15 (d) The office of wellness and resilience shall submit a
16 preliminary report of its findings and recommendations on the
17 development of a kakou pilot program, including any proposed
18 legislation, ~~a recommended implementation structure identifying~~
19 ~~the administering agency or agencies~~, and recommendations on
20 whether the program should ~~be established continue~~, to the
21 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
22 the regular session of 2027, and shall submit a final report of
23 its plan to the legislature no later than June 30, 2027.

1 (e) Beginning July 1, 2028, ~~the agencies identified~~
2 ~~pursuant to subsection (d), the office of wellness and~~
3 ~~resilience~~ may expend temporary assistance for needy families
4 (TANF) funds for the purposes of the kakou pilot program,
5 including \$130,000 per year for an external evaluator to conduct
6 data collection and to assess whether the kakou pilot program
7 meets at least one of the purposes of the temporary assistance
8 for needy families program and whether the kakou pilot program
9 effectively addresses that purpose.

10 (f) The planning period for the kakou pilot program shall cease
11 to exist on June 30, 2027.

12 (g) For the purposes of this Act, "eligible families"
13 means families who meet eligibility criteria for the temporary
14 assistance for needy families program, ~~as determined by the~~
15 ~~department of human services,~~ or any other families
16 meeting standards and requirements ~~recommended established~~ by
17 the office of wellness and resilience ~~in its plan and approval by~~
18 ~~the administering agency, provided that such standards comply with~~
19 ~~applicable federal requirements.~~

20 SECTION 3. If any part of this Act is found to be in
21 conflict with federal requirements that are a prescribed
22 condition for the allocation of federal funds to the State, the
23 conflicting part of this Act shall be inoperative solely to the

1 extent of the conflict and with respect to the agencies directly
2 affected, and this finding shall not affect the operation of the
3 remainder of this Act in its application to the agencies
4 concerned.

5 SECTION 4. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
6 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

7 SECTION 5. This Act shall take effect upon its approval,
8 and shall be repealed on June 30, 2027; provided that section 2,
9 subsection (e) shall not be repealed on that date.

S.B. NO. 2861 S.D. 2

Report Title:

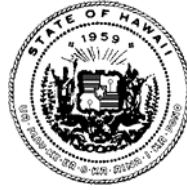
OWR; Kakou Pilot Program; TANF; Child Wellness Visits; Food Boxes; Supportive Services; Wellness Benefit; Foster Family Placement; Med-QUEST; Child Wellness Incentive Pilot Program; Eligible Recipient

Description:

Requires the Office of Wellness and Resilience to develop a comprehensive plan to establish a Kakou Pilot Program to support families and children in need. Sunsets on 6/30/2027. (SD2)

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

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

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

March 23, 2026

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

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 2861 SD2 – RELATING TO THE OFFICE OF WELLNESS AND RESILIENCE.**

Hearing: March 24, 2026, 10:00 a.m.
Conference Room 329 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of the bill, appreciates the SD2 amendments, and defers to the Office of Wellness and Resilience (OWR). DHS will collaborate with OWR in its planning of the Kakou Pilot Program to support families and children in need. This bill considers utilizing available federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to provide services for families and children in need, that may include wellness visits, food boxes to eligible families, counseling and support services to eligible families with a focus on families exiting a foster family placement, trauma-informed care services, and other related support services to families and children in need.

For the committee's information, for services described in Section 2, DHS will work with OWR to determine whether one of the four TANF purposes is met to expend the federal TANF funds. As required by federal law and to clarify what is described in the bill's preamble (see request to strike language below), the four TANF purposes are:

- (1) Provide assistance to needy families so children may be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives;

- (2) End the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage;
- (3) Prevent and reduce the incidence of out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and
- (4) Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

If the services are intended to qualify under purposes one or two, “means testing” for TANF eligibility is required.

Additionally, in accordance with 8 U.S.C. 1611(a), an individual who is not a qualified immigrant is not eligible for any federal public benefit as defined in 8 U.S.C. 1611(c). Therefore, children and families who receive planned services must be either U.S. citizens, qualified immigrants according to the terms described in section 101(a) of the Immigration and Nationality Act [8 U.S.C. 1101 et seq.], or qualified individuals lawfully residing in the U.S. in accordance with the Compacts of Free Association.

If the legislature is interested in services being available to all families regardless of citizenship, a general fund appropriation would be required for children and families who are not considered eligible qualified immigrants. Additionally, once the plan is developed, DHS anticipates requiring additional legislation and requests for appropriations.

Please note that TANF funds are not authorized for planning purposes. As the measure progresses, the Department will continue to update its testimony to reflect resource needs.

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

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i

KAWAIILOA

March 22, 2026

House Committee On Human Services & Homelessness

Hearing Time: Tuesday 3/24/2026 @ 10:00 am

Location: Conference Room 329 Via Videoconference

Re: SB2861 SD2, Relating to the Office of Wellness and Resilience

Aloha e Chair Marten, Vice Chair Olds, and Members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i hui, we are writing in **strong support of SB2861 SD2 relating to the Office of Wellness and Resilience**. This bill requires the Office of Wellness and Resilience to develop a plan for a Kakou Pilot program to support families in need by using unspent Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

TANF is a federally funded, state-run welfare program that provides cash assistance, work opportunities, and other support services to low-income families with children, with the goal of allowing children to be cared for in their own homes. TANF can be used for essential needs such as food, housing, utilities, child care, and transportation, as well as job training, with assistance limited to 60 months. Due to TANF's strict eligibility requirements and high administrative hurdles, roughly \$470 million in TANF funds have gone unspent. In addition, before TANF funds can be accessed, the state must spend a certain amount of its own funds (maintenance of effort requirements) before accessing these funds. With 40% of households in Hawaii below the Alice Threshold (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed), this bill seeks to continue addressing Hawai'i's needs by using unspent TANF funds.

SB2861 SD2 requires a comprehensive plan prior to creating the Kakou Pilot program, ensuring that the State of Hawai'i remains in compliance with Federal guidelines, avoids waste, and that the program is thoughtfully planned. This bill doesn't enact the Kakou Pilot Program, and requires multiple reports to the legislature and an independent program evaluation to demonstrate that the program meets the federal TANF purposes. In addition, the bill requires data collection and evaluation from lawmakers. Ultimately, this bill represents a responsible step toward addressing the needs of Hawai'i's most vulnerable families while ensuring that programs designed to serve them are sustainable, data-driven, and impactful.

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i strongly supports SB2861 SD2 because it addresses Hawaii's families using funds already allocated to the State. This bill prioritizes thoughtful planning with the intention of successful execution if a pilot program gets approved. With Federal funding cuts across the board, we should seek creative solutions while continuing to address Hawai'i's needs. By requiring a comprehensive plan, legislative reporting, and program evaluation, this measure ensures that any future use of TANF funds is strategic, accountable, and effective. SB2861 SD2 strikes the right balance between urgency and responsibility, allowing the State to design a program that is both compliant with federal requirements and responsive to the real needs of local families, ultimately laying down the foundation for long-term, sustainable support.

1099 Alakea Street, Suite 2530 | Honolulu, Hawaii 96813 | (808) 447-1840

Judith F. Clark
48-218 Kamehameha Highway
808-499-9966
Judithforceclark@gmail.com
Kaneohe, Hawaii 96744

February 14, 2026

To: Representative Lisa Marten, Chair,
And members of the Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

Testimony in Support of SB 2861 SD 2 Relating to the Office of Wellness and Resilience

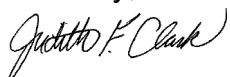
As a community advocate and the former Executive Director of Hawaii Youth Services Network who worked for non-profit organizations for 50 years, I support SB 2861 SD 2 which establishes a pilot program to support families in need.

I served as a member of the Hawaii Trauma-Informed Care Task Force from its inception and on the Office of Wellness and Resilience Advisory Board through December 2025. Over the past 4 years, the task force has developed a plan and strategies that will incorporate trauma-informed approaches to services provided to children, youth, and families.

This Kakou Pilot Program will utilize peer navigators, an evidence-informed practice, to help families identify needs and access services. It will provide material assistance to support basic needs. By strengthening families, it will reduce the overload of the Child Welfare System.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,



Judith F. Clark, MPH

SB-2861-SD-2

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 6:37:43 AM

Testimony for HSH on 3/24/2026 10:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marilyn Yamamoto	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Representative Marten and committee,

This bill, as written with the words "wellness visits" that are not clarified as being voluntary on the part of families, is unconstitutional.

HB2424 was vetoed in 2022 for violation of privacy rights arising out of the 4th amendment.

Please amend the wording to "**voluntary** wellness visits".