

ACT 311

S.B. NO. 2964

A Bill for an Act Relating to a Resource and Technical Assistance Project on Autism.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. In accordance with Section 9 of Article VII of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii and sections 37-91 and 37-93, Hawaii Revised Statutes, the legislature has determined that the appropriation contained in this Act will cause the state general fund expenditure ceiling for fiscal year 1992-1993 to be exceeded by \$200,000, or 0.006425 per cent. The reasons for exceeding the general fund expenditure ceiling are that the appropriation made in this Act is necessary to serve the public interest and meets the need provided for by this Act.

SECTION 2. **Findings and purpose.** The legislature finds that current services available in Hawaii frequently do not meet the unique needs of persons with autism. While it is impossible to determine the exact number of persons with autism or autistic-like characteristics due to the absence of an effective system of

diagnosis and follow-up, it is estimated that there are about eleven hundred people with autism in Hawaii. The lack of a diagnosis, or inaccurate diagnosis, frequently results in inappropriate and insufficient support services at home and in school for persons with autism. Families of persons with autism need to be supported because they are the primary providers of services. Without effective intervention and appropriate support to families, large numbers of persons with autism are at great risk of costly and long term, or even lifetime institutionalization.

The state planning council on developmental disabilities has submitted a report on autism in response to H.C.R. No. 212, H.D. 1, entitled "Requesting the State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council to do a Feasibility Study of Comprehensive Services for People with Autism and Autistic-like Behaviors." This report found that:

- (1) Autism is a poorly defined and misunderstood diagnostic label for a serious and pervasive life-long developmental disability caused by a brain dysfunction, first evident in infancy or early childhood;
- (2) There is promising ongoing research on autism and hope for effective drug treatment and behavioral interventions, although no cure for autism is on the horizon;
- (3) The most effective interventions known in autism now are early identification and diagnosis, effective educational and behavioral interventions, and appropriate support services with an emphasis on continuity;
- (4) Other states, such as North Carolina and Indiana, have developed highly successful program models for persons with autism that have dramatically reduced negative outcomes, such as institutionalization rates, and have successfully and effectively integrated persons with autism into classes, training, and vocational training, as well as independent living situations;
- (5) Hawaii presently does not have adequate expertise in the field of autism, and lacks a comprehensive coordinated system of services for this population; and
- (6) Due to the lack of consistently available and appropriate services, Hawaii has spent over \$500,000 a year for the past two years on just four adolescents with autism.

The report's major recommendation was that Hawaii establish and fund a three-year pilot program under the auspices of the University of Hawaii's university affiliate program, to be known as the Hawaii resource and technical assistance project on autism.

The purpose of this Act is to express strong legislative support and provide initial funding for efforts to establish support and assistance to families, professionals and persons with autism via the creation of a resource and technical assistance project. The project shall have the primary responsibility to provide:

- (1) Diagnostic expertise and a team of trained professionals to work collaboratively with parents throughout the child's evaluation;
- (2) Coordination of the development and implementation of meaningful service plans;
- (3) On-site training for families, community agencies, and schools to provide appropriate services for persons with autism;
- (4) Assistance to families in locating and accessing appropriate services;
- (5) Advocacy for individuals with autism/autistic-like characteristics to further develop and improve services; and

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- (6) Facilitate research, networking, information exchanges, and agreements among agencies and parents dealing with autism.
- (7) Information to the state legislature on the progress and achievements of the project.

SECTION 3. There is created an advisory committee, within the University of Hawaii's university affiliate program, to assure appropriate coordination of activities and provide support and direction to the project.

SECTION 4. There is appropriated out of the general revenues of the State of Hawaii the sum of \$200,000, or so much thereof as may be necessary for fiscal year 1992-1993, to provide initial funding for efforts to establish support and assistance to families, professionals, and persons with autism via the creation of a resource and technical assistance project.

SECTION 5. The sum appropriated shall be expended by the University of Hawaii for the purposes of this Act.

SECTION 6. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 1992.

(Approved June 30, 1992.)