

Opportunity for Youth Action Hawai'i Policy Initiative

Policy Interns Develop Testimony Promoting OYAH Priorities



OYAH interns developing testimony on key bills for the 2026 legislative session.

Kapri Tulang-De Silva is a third year law student and returning OYAH intern. This year, Kapri is focusing on measures addressing youth homelessness, housing, family court processes and youth identification changes.

HB 2560 HD2 and HB 2168 HD2 were heard on March 3 by the House Committee on Finance. Both measures aim to develop and implement solutions, whether through funding or more general support, to better assist students and their families experiencing homelessness or housing instability. Poverty, which encompasses homelessness and housing instability, significantly impacts families nationwide. However, the effects are particularly strong in Hawai'i due to the state's high cost of living, which frequently forces families to relocate or live in unstable arrangements. Housing instability is associated with inconsistent or disrupted enrollment and attendance, limited academic support outside of school, reduced access to basic necessities such as food, water, and a safe place to study, and elevated risks of mental health challenges, substance use, victimization, criminalization, and unsafe sexual practices.

HB 1667 lowers the age at which a youth may obtain a state civil identification card without a parent or guardian's signature from 18 to 16. At 16, youth are generally recognized as assuming greater independence and more autonomy.

Legislature Considers Bills that Affect Youth and the Justice System

HB1565, HD2/SB2678, SD1: Establishes a working group within the courts to improve family court access to legal representation for youth.

HB1626, HD1/SB2540, SD1: Elimination of fines, fees and court costs for anyone adjudicated for an offense committed during the person's minority or person's parent/guardian.

HB1667: Lowers the age to obtain a state ID without a parent/guardian signature to 16 years old.

HB2167, HD1: Requires OYS to establish a 5-year Youth Housing Stability Pilot Program.

HB2168, HD2: Requires DOE to establish a program for students experiencing homelessness.

HB2181, HD1: Requires the courts to develop and implement an automated email/text reminder system for certain cases.

SB2108, SD1: Amends factors to waive jurisdiction over a minor or adult held for criminal proceedings.

SB2861, SD2: Requires OWR to develop a plan to establish a Kakou Pilot program to support families and children in need.

SB3272: Requires DHS with OWR to design a child welfare system diversion pilot.

Key Contributors: Kapri Tulang-De Silva, Ka'ohi Gomera, Justice Castroverde-Moniz

Advisors: Melissa Pavlicek and Henry Aquino

1099 Alakea St., Suite 2530 | Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813 | (808) 447-1840 | www.oyahpolicy.com

Policy Interns Expand OYAH Advocacy Capacity

Justice Castroverde-Moniz is a second year law student and is focusing on analyzing a bill relating to court jurisdiction and a measure proposing a youth housing pilot project.

SB2108 SD1 proposes to update several factors a judge must consider before waiving jurisdiction from family to criminal proceedings. It also ensures that, even if a case is transferred to criminal court, the family court retains authority over that minor for any subsequent conduct that would normally fall under family court jurisdiction. Finally, if the judge finds by clear and convincing evidence that the minor was trafficked, sexually abused, or raped by the alleged victim in the case before or during the alleged offense, the family court not allowed to transfer that youth to adult criminal court.

This bill was heard by the Health and Human Services Committee on February 2, 2026, and passed, allowing it to proceed to its second assigned committee. On February 26, 2026, the Judiciary Committee also passed this bill with 4 ayes and 0 noes. Being that this bill passed its two assigned committees and is poised to crossover to the Senate for further discussions.

The purpose of HB2167 HD1 is to require the Office of Youth Services to establish a five-year Youth Housing Stability Assistance Pilot Program that will provide funds to designated nonprofit organizations and government agencies to offer financial assistance and related support to eligible youth. The bill was heard by the House Committee on Health and Human Services on February 19, 2026, and passed, advancing to its second committee referral. It was subsequently heard and passed by the House Committee on Finance on February 26, 2026. Having passed both of its assigned House committees, the measure is now eligible to cross over to the Senate for further consideration.

Substantively, this bill strengthens the State's capacity to respond to rising youth homelessness among individuals between eighteen and twenty-four years of age by expanding funding mechanisms targeted specifically at housing stability, less criminalization, and emergency health care.



Ka'ohi Gomera, Justice Castroverde-Moniz, Kapri Tulang- De Silva

Ka'ohi Gomera is a second year law student. Her focus is on measures relating to child welfare diversion/intervention and support services, creating an updated court notification system and eliminating fines, fees, court expenses for adjudications for offenses committed as a minor.

HB 1626 HD1 prohibits courts from imposing costs and fees on juveniles instead requiring community service through 'aina-based learning programs. Currently, court costs can range from \$10 to \$10,000. From 2021 - 2025, only 17% of juvenile penalties have been paid. Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander families are disproportionately represented in the Hawai'i Juvenile system. This bill aims to address systemic disparities, financial barriers, and shift the focus from punishment to rehabilitation.

HB 2181 HD1 requires the Judiciary to develop and administer an automated court appearance reminder system that sends text and electronic notifications for upcoming court appearances in certain cases. Although an eReminder system is currently in place, individuals must opt in and have their contact information entered manually. In practice, citation officers often do not collect phone numbers or email addresses, limiting participation. This bill would require reminders to be sent as soon as a court hearing is scheduled.

SB 2861 SD2 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. This bill seeks to support eligible families by using unspent TANF funds (Federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).