

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i

Committee: House Committee on Finance
Hearing Time: 11:30 a.m., February 24, 2023
Location: State Capitol, Conference Room 308
Re: HB349 HD2, Relating to Children

Aloha e Representative Yamashita and members of the Committee:

We are writing in **strong support** of HB 349 HD2, Relating to Children.

This bill will expand the original jurisdiction of family court to include proceedings for declaration of emancipation of minors; specify the rights of an emancipated minor; allow a minor who has reached the age of sixteen years to petition the family court for a declaration of emancipation; allow certain parties to petition the family court for voidance or rescission of a declaration of emancipation; set forth court procedures and standards in issuing, voiding, and rescinding a declaration of emancipation; provide that emancipation does not confer upon minors the right to purchase, possess, consume, or sell tobacco products or electronic smoking devices; and allow parties to appeal the court's decisions pertaining to emancipation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Providing youth with the opportunity of emancipation at 16 years old is vital, as there are many situations in which parents are harmful and/or abusive to their children. There are also cases in which parents are absent from their child's life entirely. Child abuse and neglect have drastically increased in recent years, as data from the Friend's of the Children's Justice Center of O'ahu reports. In 2021 (the latest report), the center tracked 2,060 child victims, which is up 19% from 2020. These circumstances are very dangerous for a child, limiting their access to a consistent, secure, and happy life. Emancipation would also give youth the ability to sign important and life-changing contracts, sign leases, and apply for certain services that they would otherwise need parental consent for. Emancipation would be extremely beneficial for youth health and safety.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai'i is a collaboration of organizations and individuals committed to reducing the harmful effects of a punitive incarceration system for youth; promoting equity in the justice system; and improving and increasing resources to address adolescent and young adult mental health needs. We seek to improve the continuity of programs and services for youth and young adults transitioning from minor to adult status; eliminate youth homelessness and housing market discrimination against young adults; and promote and fund more holistic and culturally-informed approaches among public/private agencies serving youth.

Please support HB 349.