

Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i

January 25, 2024

Senate Committee on Judiciary

Hearing Time: 10:00 AM

Location: State Capitol Conference Room 016

Re: HB 470 HD2 SD1, Relating to Minors

Aloha e Chair Rhoads, Vice Chair Gabbard, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i hui, we are writing in **strong support** of HB 470 HD2 SD1, relating to minors. This bill will require providers of no cost emergency shelter and related services to maintain separation for unrelated adults and minor children; and make permanent the amendments to the definition of "provider" to include organizations that are not child placing organizations or child caring institutions that meet certain criteria.

The significance of providing homeless youth with emergency shelter and services cannot be overstated. Shelter is a foundation of stability and provides access to essential resources, fostering positive life outcomes and mitigating the potential for future adversities. According to a recent street youth study, over seventy-five percent of homeless youth in Hawai‘i have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. About a twenty-five percent of homeless youth reported that their reason for becoming homeless is physical abuse or parental substance abuse. For many young people, being returned immediately to their families or foster care placements is less than optimal, leaving them with no meaningful choice but homelessness. For children, homelessness reflects a most extreme loss of family and caretaking. On top of shelter, children and young adults deserve the right to services and programs that could aid them in their journey of life, offering much needed support that these youth may not have experienced before.

Our collective, Opportunity Youth Action Hawai‘i (OYAH), works to support young people under age 25 who are disconnected from school and work, referred to as “opportunity youth.” This developmental period of time is extremely consequential to the individual growth and overall life chances of our children. Although HB 74 specifically pertains to minors, we also support the legislature’s ongoing efforts to address the needs of opportunity youth more broadly.

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 houselessness 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 470, HD2 SD1.

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