

House Committee on Human Services

Hearing Time: 9:30 a.m., January 31, 2023

Location: State Capitol

Re: HB 349, Relating to Children

Aloha e Chair Mizuno, Vice Chair Amato and members of the Committee:

We are writing in **support** of HB 349, 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; and allow parties to appeal the court's decisions pertaining to emancipation to the Intermediate Court of Appeals.

Providing a judicial avenue for emancipation at 16 years old is vital for the wellbeing of some children in certain circumstances. We note that data from the Friend’s of the Children’s Justice Center of Oʻahu indicates that in 2021 (the latest report), the center tracked 2,060 instances of child abuse and neglect, which is up 19% from 2020. A process for emancipation is one of many tools that should be available to our state judiciary to address the specific needs of youth in appropriate instances.

Our collective, the Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi (OYAH), works to support young people under age 25 who are disconnected from school and work, referred to as “opportunity youth.” This developmental time period is extremely consequential to the individual growth and overall life chances of our children. Although HB 349 specifically pertains to minors, we also support the legislature’s ongoing efforts to address the needs of opportunity youth more broadly.

The Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi hui 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 349.**