

House Committee on Human Services

Hearing Time: 09:00 AM, March 14, 2023
Re: SB 129 SD1, Relating to Minors

Aloha e Chair Mizuno, and members of the Committee:

On behalf of the Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi hui, we are writing in **strong** **support** of SB 129 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 current law which temporarily and explicitly allowed unlicensed facilities to shelter youth on an emergency basis will end in June if the legislature doesn’t take action. The 2021 law expanded the longstanding “youth right to housing” framework, allowing minors to be sheltered on a short-term, emergency basis. The significance of providing homeless youth with emergency shelter cannot be overstated as shelter is a foundation of stability and access to essential resources, fostering positive life outcomes and mitigating the potential for future adversities. According to a recent street youth study, over three fourths of homeless youth in our state have experienced physical, emotional, or sexual abuse. About a quarter 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 is less than optimal, leaving them with no meaningful choice but homelessness. For children, homelessness reflects a most extreme loss of family and caretaking. We need to help them.

Our collective, 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 SB 129 specifically pertains to minors, we also support the legislature’s ongoing efforts to address the needs of opportunity youth more broadly.

Opportunity Youth Action Hawaiʻi 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 SB 129, SD1.**