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18 March 2022

House Committee on Health, Human Services & Homelessness

Hearing Time: 09:30 AM

Location: Virtual

Re: SB 3235 SD 1, Relating to Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program

Aloha e Chair Yamane, Vice-Chair Tam, and members of the Committee:

We are writing in **strong support** of SB 3235 SD 1, relating to Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program. This bill would establish the Safe Spaces for Youth Pilot Program within the Department of Human Services. It would require the program to collaborate with all state departments that offer services to ensure the well-being of youth in Hawaiʻi to coordinate the identification of youth who are experiencing homeless and placement of homeless youth with a shelter for homeless youth. It would allow the Department of Human Services to contract with a nonprofit organization to provide a shelter for homeless youth.

This bill would contribute to the efforts of mitigating the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian, especially youth, individuals in disadvantageous and dangerous situations, such as homelessness. According to the Partners in Care 2020 Oʻahu Point In Time Count (PIT), an annual street and shelter count, about **16%** of Hawaiʻi’s homeless population were children. Furthermore, **51%** of the overall PIT Count identified Native Hawaiian and/or Pacific Islander as either their only race or part of their multiracial background. We believe this measure is a pivotal step in providing helpful and necessary resources to the Native Hawaiian community. In addition, this will help youth that are in stressful home or social situations by providing a place to feel safe, and away from trauma.

The Opportunity Youth Action 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 SB 3235 SD 1.**