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18 February 2022

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

Hearing Time: 10:10 am

Location: Virtual

Re: SB 2481, SD1, Relating to Youth Crisis Centers

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice-Chair Keith-Agaran and members of the Committee,

We are writing in **strong support** of SB 2481, SD1, relating to youth crisis centers. This

measure would establish the Youth Crisis Center Branch of the Office of Youth Services

and the position of Administrator of the Youth Crisis Branch of the Office of Youth

Services. Appropriates moneys.

This bill would address and offer aid to the youth of Hawaiʻi who struggle with mental

health and abuse. Research shows that Native Hawaiians suffer from alarming rates of

negative mental health associated risk factors and outcomes. Youth suicide ideation,

attempt and death rates are highest among Native Hawaiians. Furthermore, Native

Hawaiian keiki are overrepresented as victims of abuse and neglect (OHA). We believe

this measure is a pivotal step in the effort to advance mental health and abuse victim

support for Native Hawaiian youth. In addition, the latest committee report regarding the bill identifies a “lack of sufficient resources and services'' in communities with high incidences of poverty, crime, physical and mental abuse, school suspensions, and more. It is also found, through this committee report, that there are a limited number of emergency shelter beds dedicated for youth who are not actively engaged with child welfare or criminal justice systems. These dedicated beds would be included for youths experiencing forms of abuse at home or elsewhere, who are seeking a place away from traumatic environments.

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 2481, SD1.**

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