



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the
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By

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And

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HCR 211/HR 182 - REQUESTING THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TO CONVENE A DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING TASK FORCE TO REVIEW EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING PILOT PROJECTS, AND MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENTAL SCREENING SYSTEM IN HAWAII.

Aloha, Honorable Chair Yamane, Vice Chair Morikawa and members of the House Committee on Health, mahalo for this opportunity to testify in strong support of SCR 136. I am Jean Johnson, Associate Director for the Center on Disability Studies, College of Education at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa.

The Center on Disability Studies has enthusiastically participated in the pilot project funded by the Aloha United Way to screen high-risk preschool children in the Wai'anae Community for hearing or vision loss and for delays in the development of communication, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, personal or social problem-solving skills, and social-emotional skills.

Why have we participated? – Because, *we know that*

- Less than one fourth of Hawai'i's children arrive at kindergarten with the readiness skills they need to be successful in the classroom.
- A young child who has an unidentified hearing or vision loss will not achieve the literacy goal of reading at grade level by third grade.
- When children begin school without the learning and behavioral skills they need to succeed in the classroom, their teachers can, as early as kindergarten, predict which children will later drop out of school and not attain a high-school diploma.

We have been conducting the evaluation of this community effort because we *want to prevent disabilities in children* by addressing the needs of at-risk young children. Whereas only about 3-5% of children have a definable disability, approximately 12% of school aged children are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act because they are environmentally disabled as a result of our failure provide high quality learning opportunities for them in early childhood. Without a targeted, universal screen-

ing program, the young children who are most vulnerable and at the highest risk will not be screened and their families will not be assisted in obtaining the services they need.

The Aloha United Way has provided, not only funds for the screening, but leveraged resources to ensure that the children receive the treatment or intervention services they need to address the hearing, vision, and developmental problems that are identified. Children receive treatment for ear infections, glasses for their vision loss, and referrals to agencies that provide evaluations and early intervention services. Families receive training to enable them to better understand and help their children.

This proposed public-private partnership Task Force would not require any appropriation, but would provide to the House recommendations for developing an integrated, universal early childhood developmental screening system for Hawai'i. Targeted, universal developmental screening has been one of the community needs identified by the *Be My Voice Hawai'i Campaign* (www.BeMyVoiceHawaii.org).

Again, mahalo for providing me this opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HCR 211/HR 182