

LATE

TO: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
Senator Josh Green, M.D. Vice Chair  
Committee on Human Services

HEARING: Tuesday, March 12, 2013  
1:45p.m.  
Conference Room 016

FROM: Brian Keala Benz

RE: HB 986 – Relating to Foster Care Services

Thank you for allowing me to submit testimony in favor of House Bill 986, which would increase the foster board payments that support children in foster care in Hawaii.

If we want to build a better future for our families, communities we must care for our children, they are our future generation. Our foster children are more at risk, they are needy and vulnerable, and they lost their families due to abuse or neglect. Our children are the ones that pay the price for adult drug addiction or adult mental illness and joblessness. We have a responsibility to these children and our foster families are critical to the welfare of the children. The State of Hawaii made progress in recruiting and training caring capable care givers (foster parents) so these children will have a stable and safe place to stay in time of a crisis. It is hard work but rewarding, and foster families are very proud of what we do.

In the last 22 years, the price of food, diapers, toys, preschool, rent, electricity, school supplies and all of many items that our families purchase every day has raised. The State support for our foster children has remained the same for more than two decades.

Resource caregivers they speak for their foster children in court, supervise visitations with the foster children's birth families, and intervene to assure their foster children obtain appropriate special education services at public school. We are not babysitters, we are much more.

Our resource caregivers are the eyes and ears of the child welfare system. Our foster children come to trust us, it is in this trust they reveal to our caregivers much more than we know what happened to them. Some of those secrets are crimes that have been committed against these children. It then becomes our job to report those crimes to the authorities, and to help the healing begin.

This is work that has great value to our community and to our children, and we ask that you provide us with the support needed to provide Hawaii's foster children with the resources they need.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully Yours,

Brian Keala Benz

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TO: Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair  
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HEARING: Tuesday, March 12, 2013  
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FROM: Kau'i Keola

RE: HB 986 – Relating to Foster Care Services

Aloha,

Mahalo for this opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 986 to increase the foster board payment.

As a long time foster parent, we provide all the basic needs for our foster children. The foster board payment does not always cover the actual cost of caring for the children and providing for their needs.

Average preschool cost \$600-\$800 per month. Foster parents are providing the balance of that cost in order for the children to receive the care they need.

When we need respite services the guidelines ask us to pay the respite provider \$25.00 per child/per day. That is more than the daily rate that is provided by the foster board payment.

In addition to being able to provide more for the children, the increase in the foster board payment will help to recruit more foster families that are so desperately needed.

Due to the shortage of available homes, in the past month I had two sisters that have been in our home since December. I was asked to admit another teen and her newborn baby as there were no homes available to them. "There was no vacancy at the Inn". Our license allows us to have placement of more than the two we had so of course, we accepted the admission so they would have a safe place to stay.

I strongly support HB 986 to support of increasing the foster board payment to support the families that provide safe, loving and caring homes for our children.

Mahalo,

Kau'i Keola