



*The Judiciary, State of Hawaii*

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Human Services**

The Hon. Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair

The Hon. Josh Green, Vice Chair

Tuesday, January 29, 2013

1:30 p.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 016

by

Catherine. H. Remigio

District Family Judge

Family Court of the First Circuit

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**Bill No. and Title:** Senate Bill No. 815, Relating to Children

**Purpose:** Appropriates funds for the Honolulu zero to three court to fund the coordinator's transportation to visit children and parents, emergency housing assistance, a secure opening at a residential drug and alcohol facility that will accommodate a mother and child, development and implementation of an incentive program similar to the successful model utilized in family drug court, training and professional development of court team members and community partners, and creation and utilization of an enhanced visitation and parenting coaching site in leeward Oahu.

**Judiciary's Position:**

The Judiciary supports this bill and wishes to acknowledge the Legislature's foresight in the bill's introduction. The Judiciary does have a concern with this bill in that the monies are being appropriated to the Department of Human Services rather than the Judiciary. Since the Zero to Three Court is currently being operated under the auspices of the Family Court of the First Circuit and has been supported with Family Drug Court funds as a "stop gap" measure, we respectfully suggest that it may be more appropriate to allocate the funds to the Judiciary than to the Department of Human Services. Of course, this would be in addition to and not in lieu of any item in the current Judiciary budget request.



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In 2008, the family court started its “Zero to Three Court” in response to increasing scientific evidence that (1) babies and toddlers are neurologically compromised by dysfunctional family dynamics even if they are not directly physically harmed; (2) their compromised brains results in long lasting compromised behaviors and learning disorders; (3) early intervention is effective in preventing or alleviating these problems; (4) there are proven techniques that can help many of these babies and toddlers.

The Zero to Three Court began with federal “seed” funding and grants from the national non-profit Zero to Three organization. The court was then continued through private monies from the Kellogg Foundation and HMSA. As with all such “specialty courts,” long term sustainability necessarily requires that a dependable stream of state funding. This need came to the Zero to Three Court much earlier than expected due to consequences of the severe economic downturn. Adjustments were immediately made in order to continue the Court and its services. The Lead Judge, Judge Kuriyama, adjusted her assigned court calendars. The Family Drug Court (another specialty court begun by the family court) stepped up to the plate with much needed services to the babies and families in Zero to Three. Although greatly appreciated and much needed, the Family Drug Court cannot be expected to provide long term “stop gap” measures.

During the interim, this bill will enable the Zero to Three Court to continue providing essential services to babies and their families until more long term sustainable state funding can be secured. The services listed in this bill have already proven their effectiveness in healing traumatized brains, training better parents, and furthering family reunification.

Whether the monies are appropriated to the Judiciary or to the Department of Human Services, the Judiciary respectfully requests that this bill be approved and reported out of this Committee. If the Committee deems it more appropriate to grant the funds to the Judiciary, we respectfully suggest that the bill be amended with the last line to read: "The sums appropriated shall be expended by the JUDICIARY for the purposes of this Act."

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.