



The Judiciary, State of Hawaii

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Judiciary and Labor

Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Chair

Senator Karl Rhoads, Vice Chair

Monday, February 13, 2017, 9:30 a.m.

State Capitol, Conference Room 016

by

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WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

Bill No. and Title: Senate Bill No. 329, Relating to Legal Services.

Purpose: Senate Bill No. 329 appropriates moneys from the general fund for civil legal services for low- and moderate-income persons to be purchased by the Judiciary.

Judiciary's Position:

The Judiciary strongly supports Senate Bill No. 329 to appropriate funds for civil legal services providers to deliver civil legal services to low- and moderate-income persons. Civil legal services providers extend a lifeline to the most vulnerable persons in our community.

For fiscal year 2016 – 2017, the Judiciary received an appropriation of \$750,000.00 pursuant to Act 105, 2016 Haw. Sess. Laws, for the purchase of civil legal services for low- and moderate-income persons. As a result of this appropriation, the Judiciary awarded civil legal services contracts to the Legal Aid Society of Hawaii (LASH), Volunteer Legal Services Hawaii (VLSH), and the Domestic Violence Action Center (DVAC).

In the first three months of its contract, LASH reported that it closed 1,181 cases, which affected the lives of 2,415 low-income persons in critical areas, such as keeping children safe and secure (e.g. guardian ad litem services for abused and neglected children), preserving the home (e.g., services for eviction defense, housing discrimination, and public housing assistance),



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foreclosure prevention, and maintaining economic stability (e.g., assistance with denials, appeals and terminations of social security benefits and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).

Since the commencement of its contract, VLSH launched the Hawaii Online Pro bono (HOP) project. HOP allows income qualifying residents to post a legal question on a secured website, and receive an answer from a volunteer attorney. During the past three months, VLSH also reported that it completed over 500 intakes and held a Pop-Up Legal Clinic that served 44 individuals.

During the first quarter of its contract, DVAC reported that it provided outreach services to 52 petitioners seeking temporary restraining orders in Family Court and 24 survivors in criminal domestic violence cases. DVAC also assisted the petitioners and survivors with completing safety plans.

As described above, the current appropriation has enabled legal service providers to deliver much needed legal assistance to low- and moderate-income persons. However, this appropriation is still well below pre-recession funding levels. The Judiciary supports the increased funding for civil legal services in the amount of \$2,159,632.00. The proposed funding of \$2.1 million is the amount recommended by the working group that was assembled pursuant to House Resolution No. 12, H.D.1 and Senate Resolution No. 6, S.D. 1 (2015) in the "Plan for the Administration of Funding for Civil Legal Services" that was submitted to the legislature on December 30, 2015.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill No. 329.