



The Judiciary, State of Hawai‘i

Testimony to the House Committee on Lower and Higher Education

Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Mark J. Hashem, Vice Chair
Representative Amy A. Perruso

Tuesday, January 29, 2019 2:00 PM
State Capitol, Conference Room 309

by

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Deputy Chief Judge, Senior Family Judge
Family Court of the First Circuit

WRITTEN TESTIMONY ONLY

Bill No. and Title: House Bill No. 506, Relating to Alternative Schools for Juveniles.

Purpose: Appropriates funds to the Department of Education for an alternative school to provide ongoing education to juveniles involved in the justice system or at risk of involvement in the justice system.

Judiciary's Position:

The Judiciary submits this testimony in strong support of this bill authorizing and funding an alternative school in the Honolulu areas, to be developed by the Department of Education (DOE).

For many and varied reasons, many of which are outside the control of the students, at-risk youth and youth in the juvenile justice system are not well equipped to succeed in the traditional school setting. Often their younger years have been shaped by traumatic life experiences, dysfunctional family systems, continuing neglect and abuse, and lack of school readiness skills.



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Much of these early experiences result in short attention spans, impulsive behaviors, difficulty managing anger and frustration, and dissociative coping behaviors. Many are also laboring under undiagnosed or misdiagnosed psychological or educational disabilities. As a result, the youth are unable to succeed and experience repeated failures, despite their best efforts and the best efforts of their teachers in traditional settings.

In the past, alternative schools have been developed and were successful. The Family Court worked closely with such schools to refer appropriate students and then to support those students by augmenting their court orders with individual and/or family counseling. We also worked closely with the alternative schools to ensure student accountability through probation incentives and court reviews and appropriate court sanctions.

The DOE already provides two models of successful alternative schools in the programs that they administer in Hale Ho'omalū (the detention home) and the Hawai'i Youth Correctional Facility. These two schools are prime examples of flexible curricula, motivated experienced teachers who are invested in every single student, individualized learning goals, and close attention to bridging the youth to mainstream traditional schooling in the future. Despite the circumstances that placed the youth in these two facilities, they are indeed fortunate to receive such care.

This bill places confidence in the DOE to adequately meet the needs of this special population. The funds invested in this program will assist the youth in concrete ways and will maximize their chances to develop into healthy and contributing members of this community, thereby repaying the community's investment.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this measure.