

TO: Rep. John Mizuno, Chair
Rep. Tom Brower, Vice Chair
Committee on Human Services

HEARING: Monday, March 16, 2009, 8:00 am
Conference Room 329

FROM: Judith Wilhoite
It Takes An `Ohana

RE: SB 186

LATE
Testimony

I am the Executive Director for It Takes An `Ohana. We support the concept of this bill and I thank you for this opportunity to testify on it.

Title IV-E of the Social Security Act requires states to cover the cost of food, clothing, shelter, daily supervision, school supplies, a child's personal incidentals, childcare, insurance and travel visitation with a child's biological family in return for the feds reimbursing the states for a portion of said costs. California has been sued for being out of compliance with this law because their foster care board payments do not cover these costs. Foster parents won this case. California has appealed the judgment in favor of the foster parents and the case is now before the 9th Circuit Court. If the 9th Circuit agrees that the foster parents are right, any judgment will be mandatory for the state of Hawai'i. In order to retrain federal foster care money, states under the jurisdiction of the 9th Circuit would need to get foster care rates in line with Federal law.

Children's Rights, the National Foster Parent Association along with the University of Maryland School of Social Work have researched what the minimum adequate foster board payment should be for each state. In their publication, *Hitting the Mark – Establishing Foster Care Minimum Adequate Rates for Children*, Hawai'i's rates were found to be inadequate.

There are reasons besides remaining in compliance with federal law that oblige us to increase the board payment to foster parents. Evidence shows that inadequate rates have a negative affect on foster parent recruitment and retention which can have an adverse affect on achieving permanency for children in foster care. Studies have shown that foster parents subsidize the child's needs out of their own pockets. In hard economic times like we are in now, this can force good foster parents out of the system, for they are simply not able to afford to continue fostering our keiki.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak on this important issue.