

Testimony for the February 17, 2022 Board of Education Meeting

Human Resources Committee Meeting - Agenda Item III.B

Aloha Committee Chairperson Kaimana Barcarse, Committee Vice Chairperson Shanty Asher and Board Members:

Thank you for allowing this opportunity to provide written testimony in reference to discussion related to Agenda Item III.B. Committee Action on the recommendation concerning Department of Education's plan of reorganization updated as of June 30, 2021.

The Plan of Organization Updated as of June 30, 2021 (Page D3) includes a Community Engagement Branch "CEB", Community Relations Program Assistant Position #801307. This position was eliminated due to "budgetary constraints" effective September 30, 2021.

As the incumbent previously occupying Position #801307, I was notified in mid-June 2021 by then Assistant Superintendent of the Office of Strategy, Innovation and Performance "OSIP", that the position was being eliminated due to budgetary constraints. Since receiving the first notification in a work email, I received six subsequent letters reminding me of the position's elimination. Due to the termination notification being served at the end of the fiscal year, limited job opportunities remained available within the Department between June and September 2021. As a result the incumbent felt the only option was to enter into early retirement and did so involuntarily and with reservations effective October 1, 2021.

Prior to being eliminated, the former incumbent provided guidance and support statewide to the Parent-Community Networking Centers "PCNC" focusing on strengthening family engagement to affect student achievement and the well-being of the whole child.

The PCNC program was established in 1986 through Act 51 (amended as Act 221) in public schools throughout the state and continue to be staffed by coordinators who develop and implement school-relevant family engagement opportunities guided by Hawaii Board of Education Parent Family Engagement/Partnership Policy 101-14 and the school's principal or administration.

In addition to the PCNC program, Position #801307 also supported the state-level work of School Community Councils, the Community Children's Councils, and collaborated with the Department's military liaison to include and partner with staff representing Mark Takai Transition Centers located in schools with high counts of military –dependent students.

During the four years the former incumbent was assigned to the PCNC program we were able to increase the number of PCNC staff hired at schools, learning opportunities for professional advancement were made available to PCNC staff to help increase their knowledge and competencies, resources and partnerships were expanded, and communication internal and external to the PCNC program experienced an increase.

In August 2021 at a CEB meeting called by the acting director which was attended by myself and a program specialist for the Community Children's Councils, I was directed to support the Community Children's Council's projects for the duration of employment and upon inquiry was informed that there would be no continuing or future state support provided to transition or sustain existing PCNC program and PCNC partner initiatives and that the PCNC program "was gone".

I share the information in this testimony in the hope that it may be helpful to the Board in moving forward with a plan to support the many family engagement initiatives and efforts of the Parent-Community Networking Centers and staff as they continue to work with partners-locally, nationally, and internationally to provide valuable resources for families and their children.

My sincere appreciation for your attention to the tasks ahead of you. As a former Department employee and grandparent of students attending our public schools, I Thank You.

Lani Solomona