EXECUTIVE OFFICE ON EARLY LEARNING

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Testimony in **Support** of
S.B. 2975 S.D. 1, Relating to Early Learning
By GG Weisenfeld, Director

House Committee on Education
March 14, 2014
2:00 p.m., Room 309

Chair, Vice-Chair, and Members of the Committee:

Good afternoon. I am GG Weisenfeld, Director of the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL). EOEL is in support of Senate Bill 2975, Senate Draft 1.

The purpose of this bill is to appropriate funds for the Executive Office on Early Learning to enter into contracts with third party providers for family-child interaction learning programs.

EOEL requests that $1 million be appropriated for this purpose, to be used in FY2015 for the 2014-2015 school year. This will provide approximately an additional 400 four-year-old children with access to a prekindergarten program.

Family-child interaction learning programs are an important part of the early learning system that EOEL is charged with developing pursuant to Act 178, Session Laws of Hawaii 2012.

To prepare as many four-year-olds for kindergarten as possible, it is important to use and expand the already-existing mixed-delivery system. EOEL's approach is to support such a mixed-delivery system, which includes private, community-based preschools; Head Start programs; family child care homes; special education prekindergarten classrooms; family-child interaction learning programs; and DOE-EOEL prekindergarten programs.

All of these options are funded through a variety of funding streams, including federal, parent (which make up the highest percentage), private foundation (such as Kamehameha Schools), special education, and state funds.

This session, EOEL is seeking funds for the school year beginning August 2014 for:

- Family-child interaction learning programs ($1 million for 400 children*); and
- The DOE-EOEL Prekindergarten Program ($4,470,208 for 640 children*).

*Free- and reduced-price meal eligible – a family of four could qualify if its income is at or below $50,117.

More than five organizations provide family-child interaction learning programs -- such as INPEACE's Keiki Steps and Partners in Development Foundation's Tutu & Me programs -- at sites across the state. These organizations reach several thousand children.

This bill appropriates funds to contract with FCIL providers, which is an important part of the effort to reach more four-year-olds in the 2014-2015 school year.

Each component of our budget request for the FCIL program is linked to building a quality prekindergarten program. Prekindergarten experiences must be of high quality to make a difference in outcomes for children. To ensure high quality is implemented, we have identified five key elements that must be incorporated within the program:

- **Ongoing professional development.** Research has shown that the most successful method for creating high-quality teachers is systematic, ongoing professional development. That is why we will contract for services ($90,000) that will coordinate targeted professional development workshops for the participating administrators and teachers on topics such as child development, use of individual child formative assessments, effective family engagement techniques, and curriculum. For teachers to participate in the required monthly workshops, travel for neighbor island staff to participate in biannual seminars ($8,000) has been included. Programs will also be asked to justify how they will mentor their teachers.

- **Focus on Child Outcomes.** To ensure children are learning and progressing in their growth and development, the curriculum implemented in the program must be aligned with the Hawaii Early Learning and Development Standards (HELDS). HELDS are research-based standards that identify the expectations of knowledge and behavior for children from birth through kindergarten entry. They are a set of expected knowledge and behaviors categorized into five "domains" or areas based on the National Education Goals Panel framework: Physical Well-being, Health, and Motor Development; Social and Emotional Development; Approaches to Learning; Cognition and General Knowledge; and Language and Literacy. To measure a child's progress in these domains, the teachers will be required to conduct ongoing formative assessments on each child ($4,000).

- **Program Assessment.** To evaluate the quality of teacher-child interactions, EOEL would use one of several tools available to provide direct feedback to the teachers. The indicators that would be collected biannually include: the climate of the environment and emotional support provided to the students; site organization including the use of

materials and behavior management; and instructional support that is occurring, such as concept development and language modeling ($8,000).

- **Environment.** To establish a high-quality program, an appropriate environment must be created. Sites would need consumable materials for the children to use, such as writing materials and paper ($40,000).

EOEL suggests the following amendments to the bill:

- Clarify that the Office shall "enter into contracts with third party providers **of** family-child interaction learning programs."
    - Page 1, lines 3 and 11

EOEL respectfully asks that the committee move this bill forward. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.