**TO:** Senator Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair

Senator Gilbert S.C. Keith-Agaran, Vice Chair

Senate Committee on Ways and Means

**FROM:** Robert G. Peters, Chair

Early Learning Board

**SUBJECT: Measure:** HB No. 2543, H.D. , S.D. 1 – RELATING TO ACCESS TO LEARNING

**Hearing Date:** June 30, 2020

**Time:** 10:15 am.

**Location:** Auditorium

**EARLY LEARNING BOARD’S POSITION: Support the Intent and Comments**

Thank you for this opportunity to offer testimony on behalf of the Early Learning Board (ELB) in support of the purpose and intent of H.B. No. 2543, H.D. 1, S. D. 1with comments. I am Robert G. Peters, Chair of the ELB.

The ELB is the governing board for the Executive Office on Early Learning (EOEL) and policy-making entity for the State early learning system. The Board appreciates the support given by the Legislature in the past 5 years to expand public pre-K and develop the EOEL infrastructure as it works to develop a State Early Learning System. The ELB anticipates working with the Legislature to expand access to, and affordability of safe, healthy early learning environments that maximize quality early learning experiences as part of this effort.

The ELB recognizes the urgency of achieving the goals of this legislation if we are to create equitable access to quality early learning experiences for our keiki and realize the benefits attributed to early learning as a pathway to school and life success. We wish to optimize the chances of successfully achieving that goal and, at the same time, to do so in the most efficient fashion building upon what already exists while addressing the infrastructure and resource needs to provide access to underserved members of our communities. It is achievable if we support our existing providers who are struggling in the face of COVID-19. And, it is achievable if we address our workforce capacity challenges; if not for the passion of a dedicated workforce, there would not be many who would want to work and stay in the early childhood field given the challenging pay levels At the same time, the ELB appreciates the impact of the cost of childcare for families and the need to provide supports to offset those costs for our struggling families.

The ELB thanks the Legislature for designing a bill that,

* Works toward better information to inform policy and decision-making around early learning;
* Supports our private providers through DHS grants;
* Expands the Preschool Open Doors Program;
* Eliminates the early learning coordinator position which would have duplicated EOEL and Early Learning Board responsibilities;
* Supports expansion of the early learning system through Hawaiian language pathways for our children; and
* Considers alternative locations for early learning programs such as in the libraries. EOEL had previously discussed the possibility of establishing family-child interaction learning programs with the State Librarian and look forward to advancing this effort

While the Board has not yet had the opportunity to discuss the specifics of this current iteration of HB No. 2543, H.D. 1, S.D. 1, it will do so at its July 9, 2020, meeting. I anticipate there will be questions raised about the separation of charter preschools from EOEL administrative authority, what is meant by “create programs and private sector delivery systems that can pose the essential information and policy questions, monitor the progress of the implementation of this part, and generate timely detailed reports” as DHS responsibilities, and whether it might be prudent to have P-20 assume the DHS data-base responsibilities.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Legislature to expand access to high-quality early learning programs and services in the state and make its vision a reality. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.

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