June 16, 2020

TO: The Honorable David Y. Ige, Governor

State of Hawaii

FROM: Robert G. Peters, EdD

Chair, Early Learning Board

SUBJECT: Position Cuts, HB 2200, SD 1

Dear Governor Ige:

At the request of the Early Learning Board, I am submitting this memo because of the Board’s serious concerns about positions cut from the Executive Office of Early Learning’s budget requests, all needed to continue building Hawaii’s early childhood system and also continuing efforts to provide quality experiences for preschool children in at-risk communities.

The specific positions eliminated include one program specialist along with one teacher and six educational assistants for public school preschool classrooms currently operating in Honokaa, Hookena, Kohala, Kula, Likelike, Mountain View and Pahala.

The ELB specifically requests that all eight positions be restored with associated funding:

* The Program Specialist position is crucial to systems coordination which is especially needed as we help stabilize and support a sector that has dire needs and as we move into the reopening/recovery phases of the Pandemic.
* The teacher and educational assistant positions are critical for classrooms to open in just two months. The classrooms impacted serve a core service that is essential to reopening the economy and require this staffing to comply with Covid-19 health and safety guidelines. Their elimination would mean fewer childcare spaces for families returning to work. These positions have the capacity to service 100 children and their families and are in high-need areas where there are no/few other providers, and classroom closure means greater reduced access to childcare for families in these areas.

For your information, more specific information about each of these positions accompanies this memo.

All eight of these positions are critical for the EOEL to carry out its statutory responsibilities and, more importantly, crucial to meet the needs of Hawaii’s children and families particularly in these challenging times. Thank you for your attention to the ELB request to restore funding for these needed positions.

**Executive Office of Early Learning Positions:**

Program Specialist (Position# 803655)

* **Position is currently filled by an 89-day hire due to the critical importance of the work. Multiple administrative holdups with paperwork outside of the Office, and beyond its control, have held up filling the position. When those barriers were finally overcome, the hiring freeze was implemented in April.** The position is in active recruitment: EOEL is waiting to interview candidates and ready to select a candidate immediately. The 89-day hire has also applied for the position.
* Position is integral to addressing EOEL’s statutory responsibility to coordinate the early care & education system through work to implement Hawaii’s Early Childhood State Plan and associated strategic plans. **The work,**
  + **Involves convening and collaborating across public and private agencies.**
  + **Involves leveraging of resources to ensure young children can access quality care/education.**
  + **Includes supporting and sustaining our early care/education providers to help prevent the collapse of the industry, and families with young children, all which is more critical than ever during/after COVID-19. Position is necessary to address the impacts of COVID-19.** Before and since COVID-19, this position has been heavily involved in efforts to address these needs on multiple levels:
    - The input of providers and families is critical to properly inform plans for economic recovery and sustainability. The position assists with soliciting, gathering, and sharing multifaceted input with key stakeholders.
    - Providers may know what is important for young children, but how to do that in today’s context is new -- children and families now need support in more and different ways -- and they need to learn from each other. The position assists with the intense work of planning and facilitating these key connections.
  + **Position is responsible for federal grant and contracts management**, ensuring compliance with federal requirements/guidelines, and serving as liaison and reporting to federal agencies.
  + Cutting this position will be detrimental to work that is crucial for the state at this time.

School-level positions for EOEL Public Prekindergarten Program (1 teacher, 6 Educational Assistants)

* These are direct instructional staff positions. **7 EOEL Public Pre-K Program classrooms at 7 schools will have to close as a result of the cuts.**
* 1 teacher and 1 Educational Assistant (EA) per classroom are necessary to meet the 1:10 teacher-to-child ratio mandated by statute for health & safety. **Positions are especially needed to address the current guidelines for health & safety in light of COVID-19 pursuant to DHS and CDC.**
* If the positions are cut, resulting in a classroom closure, the associated teacher/EA will also no longer have an EOEL Public Pre-K Program position; this will trigger a Reduction In Force (RIF) within the school and could impact other schools.

**This will hurt our schools, communities, and families.** If the classrooms are impacted, families will have to find alternative early care/education for their children to allow them to work but will have difficulty (families have been applying since March for their children to be in the classrooms):

* + The impacts of COVID-19 have further exacerbated the limited availability of spaces at programs across the state.
* **Many classrooms are in rural areas where it is generally difficult to find qualified personnel. To lose the EOEL Public Pre-K Program at a school because the school had found a substitute/TA to serve in the position is an equity issue for these principals** ... and some are finally on the verge of securing qualified staff for the Program. Schools are actively recruiting for all the Educational Assistant positions (e.g., principals are already interviewing candidates).
* **Some individuals currently filling the Educational Assistant positions have already enrolled in and may have paid for coursework at UH to fulfill new statutory requirements needed for them to be eligible to remain in their positions; they have applied for the permanent positions.**
* Note:  These are existing classrooms – not the 10 new ones scheduled to open this fall as a result of funding the Legislature appropriated in 2019.