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

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

Members of the Senate Committee On Ways and Means

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

Early Learning Board

**Subject**: **Measure**: SB 2701 SD 1, Relating to Early Learning

**Hearing Date**: Wednesday, February 23, 2022

**Time**: 10:05 A.M.

**Location**: Conference Room 211 and Videoconference

**Description**: Establishes a one-year Early Child Care Worker Subsidy Pilot Program to assist in retaining the existing early child care workforce. Appropriates funds for the pilot program to be expended by the Department of Human Services. Appropriates funds for the Early Learning Special Fund to be expended by the Executive Office on Early Learning for the Hawaii Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program. The pilot program repeals on 7/1/2023. (SD 1)

**Early Learning Board Position: Support**

Aloha. I am Robert G. Peters, Chair of the Early Learning Board (ELB). Thank you for this opportunity to support the intent of SB 2701 SD 1.

The Early Learning Board (ELB) appreciates the Legislature’s continued support of early learning, despite the challenges the State has had to face because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We are grateful for your continued efforts to increase access to early care and education and the recognition that the need for quality early child care and education far exceeds the current State’s capacity to deliver it. One of the critical capacity issues arises from the inadequacy of compensation for providers, who are challenged to afford Hawaii’s cost of living. The median wage for child care workers is well below the living wage of $20.61/hr. calculated for a single adult in our State. This situation is a barrier to attracting and retaining quality providers and child care workers and accounts, in part, for the high early childhood educator turnover rate not only in Hawaii but across the nation.

This bill, SB 2701 SD 1, aligns with the ELB annual priorities which include, “Supporting efforts to expand workforce capacity building” and the Board’s support of the University of Hawaii’s College of Education’s effort to conduct a compensation study with recommendations about achieving equity with sustainable living wages for early educators, a vital part of our State’s economic infrastructure.

Act 210, SLH 2021, established the Early Childhood Educator Stipend Program but without an appropriation. This program, administered by EOEL in partnership with the University of Hawaii, currently leverages private source funding that would provide upfront financial support, covering early childhood tuition and fees, to individuals in the early care and education system. One of the greatest barriers for early childhood professionals to pursue higher education is not having the money to pay for tuition; the appropriation in this bill would help to address this critical need and help to guarantee that our community workforce can be served with quality, much needed child care.

Mahalo for the opportunity to offer this testimony supportive of SB 2701 SD 1.