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Hawaii Government Employees Association
AFSCME Local 152, AFL-CIO

November 22, 2005

Ms. Marie C. Laderta, Director
Department of Human Resources Development
235 S. Beretania Street, Suite 1400
Honolulu, HI 96813

Dear Ms. Laderta:

In accordance with Act 238, SLH 2005, H.C.R. 265 and the process the stakeholders agreed to in developing this report, we are submitting our comments about its contents. We appreciated the opportunity to work with your staff, and wish to recognize the efforts of Jan Kemp, Carleton Taketa, and Dawn Young in producing this report. We also want to thank Elizabeth Kent and Jen Graf from the Judiciary's Center for Alternative Dispute Resolution for facilitating our meetings. Their guidance helped us to work more productively and cooperatively.

On balance, we agree with the findings and recommendations in the report. The creation of a new social worker series not only establishes a career ladder for those who graduate from an accredited social work program, but it promotes the maintenance of high standards of qualification, education and experience for those who call themselves social workers. Anyone who receives services from a social worker in state government will benefit too. The drive to restore the social work series was in large part about maintaining quality public services and recognizing the value of the specialized education and experience gained through an accredited program in social work.

The HGEA is particularly concerned about the challenges in recruiting and retaining social workers who are employed in state departments. There is a definite need for Hawaii's colleges and universities to enroll and graduate additional students in social work. Like other states, Hawaii faces a shortage of social workers.

Supply is only part of the problem. Working conditions and professional training opportunities need improvement too. Large and stressful caseloads, less than desirable work settings and complex social problems make the jobs of state social workers very difficult. Often they are working with most challenging social problems and populations. Unless these conditions improve, the shortage of social workers in the public sector will likely continue.

These obstacles were beyond the scope of this report. However, it is our intent to work with state social workers, the National Association of Social Workers, Hawaii Chapter, state departments and the local social work programs to address these important issues. A cadre of well trained, experienced social workers is essential to provide quality social services to children, families and adults served by state agencies.

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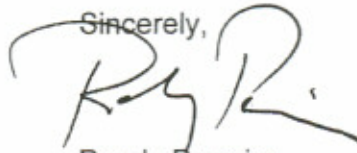
Our primary objection to the report concerns the assertion that matters of position classification should be determined by DHRD, without direct legislative involvement. In most cases, that is appropriate, and we do not suggest that every difference with DHRD over position classification should be resolved at the legislature. DHRD has the statutory authority to establish and modify civil service classes of work under Chapter 76, HRS. It does not have the authority through its personnel decisions to set public policy in other areas.

In this case, DHRD's expertise in classification and personnel management should not determine how public social services are to be delivered and by whom. By unilaterally eliminating the social worker series because of a shortage, DHRD, in effect, determined how public social services would be delivered.

As a result of public hearings on H.B. 1146 (Act 238, SLH 2005) and H.C.R. 265, the Legislature concluded that was a poor public policy decision. The Legislature acknowledged the importance of the social work profession and declared that it was in the best interest of the state to maintain an updated social work series to deliver essential social services to the most vulnerable groups. In many areas of public social services, additional social workers are needed because the client population has grown and their needs have become greater and more complex. Without an increased supply of social workers, we will be unable to meet the state's demand.

It is now up to the state and other interested parties to make public employment for social workers more rewarding, not just financially but professionally. Improved salaries, better working conditions, and more supportive and effective supervision can attract new social workers to the public sector, while also keeping trained and experienced ones.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Randy Perreira', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Randy Perreira
Deputy Executive Director