

Talking Points for Changing the Foster Care Rate

■ In Hawaii, our children are our most valuable resource. If we want to build a better future for our families and our communities, we must provide for our children. Yet the State foster board reimbursement rates to support our foster children have not been increased for the past 24 years.

■ We all know that during the last 24 years, the price of food, and diapers, and toys, and preschool, and rent, and electricity, and school supplies and all of the many, many items that our families purchase every day have soared. The cost of some of these items has surely doubled in the past 24 years, but state support for our foster children has remained the same for more than two decades.

■ More than almost any other children, our foster children are children at risk. They are among the most needy and vulnerable residents of our communities. They have “lost” their families, often because of abuse or neglect, and many are truly alone in the world.

■ What has happened to our foster children is not their fault, but they often pay the highest price for our social ills. More than anyone else in our society, it is our children who pay the price for problems such as adult joblessness or adult drug addiction or adult mental illness.

■ We all recognize that we have a responsibility to these children, and the state of Hawai`i has made great progress in recent years in recruiting and training caring, capable resource caregivers, formerly referred to as foster parents, so these children will have stable, safe places to stay in times of crisis.

■ Imagine you are bringing a frightened and lonely child into your house to live. This child may be a little girl who has lost everything that matters in her life. It may be a young boy who has no idea where he will live, or what will happen to him next. Instinctively, you understand how important it is to make these children feel welcome, feel loved, and feel safe. No institution can do that. Only a family can do that, which is why our foster families are so critical to the welfare of these children. It is difficult work, but it is incredibly rewarding, and foster families are very proud of what we do.

■ More and more, our state relies on our foster families, which have become a lynchpin of our child welfare system. But we as a community have neglected our responsibility to our foster children, and to our foster families.

■ What we have done is shift much of the financial burden for caring for Hawaii’s foster children from the state to our foster families. We know many, many foster families reach into their own pockets each day to pay for school supplies or diapers or football uniforms for their foster children. They feel have no choice. We have left them no choice.

■ We know that recruitment of resource families, formerly referred to as foster families, becomes much more challenging, and retention of resource families becomes more difficult

when foster board reimbursements do not cover the cost of caring for these children. Some of us are struggling with the financial challenges of raising our own children, and we must choose between fostering and meeting our responsibilities to our own families. We don't want to choose, but we have to.

■ The state Department of Human Services invests a great deal of money in recruiting and training resource caregivers, formerly referred to as foster parents, because the department understands how critical resource caregivers are to the system. Today, many resource caregivers advocate for their foster children in court, supervise visitations with the foster children's birth families, and intervene to assure their foster children obtain appropriate special education services at public school. We are not babysitters. We are much more.

■ In many cases, resource caregivers, formerly referred to as foster parents, are the eyes and ears of the child welfare system. Our foster children come to trust us, and they open up and tell us secrets. Some of those secrets are crimes that have been committed against these children. It then becomes our job to report those crimes to the authorities, and to help the healing begin.

■ Surely our most important responsibility is to be loving parents to someone else's child, and those of you who are parents know how challenging parenting can be.

■ This is work that has great value to our community and to our children, and we ask that you provide us with the support needed to provide Hawaii's foster children with the resources they need.