

Talking Points for HB581 and SB499

Bill will:

Appropriate funds for staff positions and services to support the Hawaii zero to three court.

THE HAWAII ZERO to THREE COURT

The Hawaii Zero to Three Court ("HZTT") began operating in 2009, funded through federal earmarks that were followed by a grant from HMSA and more recently has been supported by a Family Drug Court SAMHSA grant, which expires in July 2017. SAMSHA funding ends in July, *thus funding is critically needed to ensure continued and enhanced services and resources and maintain the capacity of the Hawaii Zero to Three court team.*

The Issue

Infants under age have historically comprised the largest age cohort (273 infants, 2015) of child protective service cases in Hawaii (and nationwide), followed by children aged one, two, and three. In calendar year 2016, children under age three comprised nearly 25% of all children in Hawaii's foster care system.

- Abuse and neglect has been linked with serious developmental consequences for infants and toddlers, including attachment disorders, PTSD and developmental delays.
- These negative consequences can be further exacerbated in a foster care system with infrequent visitation, multiple placements changes, and delays in achieving permanence.
- Infants and toddlers enter the child welfare system at the most vulnerable time in their lives, but also at the point at which healing and protective intervention can make the most difference. We know that a child's first few years are the most crucial stages for brain growth and learning.
- Developmental neuroscience demonstrates that effective early intervention services and child welfare policies can help infants and toddlers overcome the negative consequences stemming from maltreatment.



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Risks and the Power of Early Intervention

- Infants and toddlers in the child welfare system have likely faced any number of threats to their healthy development including low birth weight, poverty, low maternal education, single parent households, prenatal exposure to alcohol, and exposure to violence. All of these risk factors jeopardize their social-emotional and cognitive development.
- Impacts on social and emotional development occur because when children are maltreated during the early years, they learn that the world is unpredictable and insensitive and that they cannot count on their caregivers to protect them. Children who form insecure attachments in the early years have lower social competence, show less empathy for others, have difficulty recognizing others' emotions, and have difficulty trusting in future relationships (Bowlby, 1973). They are unable to focus on the developmental tasks that will position them to succeed in school and provide pathways to meaningful employment. On the continuum of children served by early care and education programs, this group represents the least likely to have positive early learning experiences. Recent research demonstrates a clear connection between social-emotional problems in the first three years and later problems in school (Gray, Herberle, Carter, 2012).
- Impacts on cognitive development are documented by the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW). The surveys show that half of maltreated infants also exhibit some form of developmental delay (Administration for Children and Families Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, 2007). By the time these children reach school age, they are six times more likely to have a delay (Leslie, Gordon, Lambors, Premji, Peeples, Gist, 2005), and likely to score lower on standardized language, reading, math, and science assessments by second grade (Perlman, Fantuzzo, 2010). As a result, these children are less likely to go to college, and more likely to come into contact with the criminal justice system, be unemployed, and fall below the poverty line as adults (Zielinski, 2009). Children who experience early maltreatment are also more likely to have health (Shonkoff, Boyce, McEwen, 2009) and mental health problems through adulthood (Zielinski, 2009).



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- There is no population more at-risk for failure than infants and toddlers in the child welfare system. Fortunately, research confirms that the early years present an unparalleled window of opportunity to effectively intervene (Heckman, Grunewald, Reynolds, 2006). Research-informed decision-making, combined with developmentally appropriate services for the children and sensitive responses to the trauma histories of their parents, can change the odds for these at-risk babies and toddlers. To be effective, interventions must begin early and be designed with the characteristics and experiences of these infants, toddlers, and families in mind.
- Intervening in the early years can lead to significant cost savings over time through reductions in child abuse and neglect, criminal behavior, welfare dependence, and substance abuse. It also has the potential to reduce or eliminate educational disparities when these children reach school.

A SOLUTION:

The national ZERO TO THREE organization created model Safe Babies Court Teams in a number of states. The Court Team project is rooted in developmental science and aims to:

- Improve outcomes for maltreated infants and toddlers,
- Reduce the reoccurrence of substantiated abuse and neglect of infants and toddlers in the court's jurisdiction, and
- Change the court's culture to focus on the needs of infants and toddlers.

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