



**PRESS RELEASE**  
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## **The Hawai‘i Advisory Committee to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights Releases Report on Examining Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare System and the Overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian Children and Families**

The Hawai‘i Advisory Committee (the “Committee”) to the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights released a report, *Examining Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare System and the Overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian Children and Families*, following a series of web briefings. During this study, the Committee received testimony and written statements from various stakeholders including researchers, legal and community advocates, judicial representatives, various government officials and impacted families.

Through the testimony they received, the Committee identified several key findings including:

- (i) Native Hawaiian children and families are overrepresented within Hawai‘i’s child welfare system and experience disparities in child welfare outcomes within the system;
- (ii) Cultural, historical, and intergenerational trauma rooted in the history of colonization of Hawai‘i has led to increased rates of poverty and socioeconomic inequality, which likely contributes towards increased system contact and, ultimately, overrepresentation in the child welfare system;
- (iii) Government-run child welfare systems, including Hawai‘i’s, may have been rooted in bias against racial minorities. While this bias may no longer be explicitly present, implicit or unconscious bias may have been built into child welfare systems;
- (iv) Parents may not be properly informed of their rights throughout the child welfare process or may be reluctant to exercise their rights;
- (v) Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare System Branch’s staffing concerns, including job vacancies and inadequate resources, may be impacting child welfare outcomes;
- (vi) Child welfare laws and legal standards of proof applied in child welfare cases may leave room for implicit bias towards certain groups;
- (vii) Several factors within the judicial process may positively or negatively impact the outcome of child welfare cases, such as the availability or quality of the judge, legal representatives, and Guardian Ad Litem; and
- (viii) Culturally sensitive services/programs have been particularly successful in contributing to the overall reduction in foster children and the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian children in foster care.

The recommendations in the report are directed to the Commission, requesting specific actions from stakeholders, including the U.S. Congress and President, Hawai‘i’s Governor, Legislature, and Judiciary, Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare Branch, and Hawai‘i’s

School of Social Work and School of Law, to remedy the above barriers. Key recommendations include:

- (i) Improve data collection and accuracy to better inform policy and service decisions, including disaggregating data related to Native Hawaiian children and families;
- (ii) Improve transparency within Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare Services Branch;
- (iii) Increase support for child welfare staff, including funding competitive salaries and improving access to psychological care and wellness resources;
- (iv) Continue implementing culturally informed child welfare policies and continue emphasizing culturally responsive training for service providers;
- (v) Prioritize preventative strategies to keep Native Hawaiian children and families from entering the child welfare system;
- (vi) Address the root causes of poverty in Hawai‘i that contribute to child welfare system failures, including expanding social safety nets to reduce financial stressors for young families and increasing affordable housing for families with minor children;
- (vii) Increase funding for the judiciary to attract and retain more individuals to serve as guardians ad litem and attorneys for parents;
- (viii) Implement judiciary policies that require judges to hold review hearings more frequently and require judicial personnel to complete regular implicit bias training;
- (ix) Develop “grow-your-own” programs at the University of Hawai‘i Thompson School of Social Work and William Richardson School of Law in order to recruit and train local community members to remain in Hawai‘i after graduation and serve as social workers and legal representatives in child welfare cases;
- (x) Modify the “evidence-based” criteria of the Family First Prevention Services Act that limits funding access for culturally grounded interventions;
- (xi) Caution Hawai‘i’s legislators to carefully consider whether Hawai‘i should enact a Native Hawaiian equivalent of the Indian Child Welfare Act, recognizing stakeholders hold differing views on whether the legislation would effectively reduce Native Hawaiian involvement in the child welfare system;

The Hawai‘i Advisory Committee Chair, Shaunda Makaimoku said: “The Committee is grateful to those who provided testimony and statements regarding the overrepresentation of Native Hawaiian families within Hawai‘i’s Child Welfare System. The Committee also appreciates ideas shared on how best to address and mitigate the amount of Native Hawaiian families within the Child Welfare System. It is the Committee’s hope that Federal and State policymakers and authorities carefully consider the findings in our report and adopt the recommendations to ensure equitable care is given to Native Hawaiian children and their families.”

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*The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. For information about the Commission, please visit [www.usccr.gov](http://www.usccr.gov) and follow us on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).*