

EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

HONOLULU

July 8, 2008

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIONS TO SENATE BILL NO. 2878

Honorable Members  
Twenty-Fourth Legislature  
State of Hawaii

Pursuant to Section 16 of Article III of the Constitution of the State of Hawaii, I am returning herewith, without my approval, Senate Bill No. 2878, entitled "A Bill for an Act Relating to Early Learning."

The purpose of this bill is to help Hawaii's children succeed upon entry into kindergarten by: (1) establishing an early learning system to be known as Keiki First Steps for children from birth until they enter kindergarten; (2) creating the Early Childhood Education Council attached to the Department of Education to develop and administer Keiki First Steps; (3) establishing the Keiki First Steps Grant Program and Keiki First Steps Trust Fund; and (4) statutorily establishing the Pre-Plus Program to promote the development of early learning facilities. Although this bill does not include an appropriation, Act 158, Session Laws of Hawaii 2008, established three positions and appropriated \$250,000 in general funds for the Early Childhood Education Council. This bill is the result of recommendations contained in the report submitted to the Legislature by the Early Learning Educational Task Force established by Act 259, Session Laws of Hawaii 2006.

I have supported early learning opportunities for children and will continue to do so. Most recently, in 2005, I established the Quality Care Program administered by the Department of Human Services. This program provides incentives to providers of childcare services in all settings who adopt

quality standards or pursue professional development. Increased funding I approved for the Preschool Open Doors Program beginning in 2005, as part of the Quality Care Program, has enabled 2,240 new children to attend preschool.

This bill is objectionable because it establishes a Council that would have a programmatic impact on early childhood education programs outside of the framework of existing State agencies that are responsible for funding, licensing, and regulating these programs. This bill would vest in a Council the responsibility for developing and administering an early learning system with the authority to hire staff, expend State funds without appropriation or allotment, establish policies and procedures that impact State programs, expand these programs without regard to potential fiscal implications on other State programs, develop standards that would have to be enforced by other public entities, release data without seeking the approval of State organizations, and recommend the apportionment of State monies.

The powers vested in this Council could adversely impact the ability of the Department of Human Services to license, fund, regulate, and terminate early childhood education programs as provided for in Chapter 346, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

Further, I remain concerned that this bill anticipates a program with substantial, indeterminate costs. Cost models prepared by the Act 259 Task Force projected full implementation of a Keiki First Steps program for four-year-old children in the range of \$144 million to \$170 million. The Task Force is to be commended for undertaking the work necessary to make these estimates. However, they also reveal the challenges that launching such a program would pose, given the current and

anticipated fiscal outlook for the State.

Although I cannot approve this bill at this time, we can continue the progress. I propose to establish an Early Childhood Education Council via an executive order to continue the work of the Act 259 task force. Recognizing the revised revenue projections for the State, the Council will have the opportunity to focus on the efficient use of existing resources, including the Quality Care and Preschool Open Doors Program; recommend enhancements to existing programs; and assist in the identification of additional funding opportunities, including maximizing the draw-down of federal revenues to which the State is entitled.

For the foregoing reason, I am returning Senate Bill No. 2878 without my approval.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Linda Lingle", written in a cursive style.

LINDA LINGLE  
Governor of Hawaii