

# Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda

2024



**HCAN** *Speaks!*  
Hawai'i Children's Action Network

## Introduction

This ninth annual Hawai'i Children's Policy Agenda, published by Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!, reflects the input of 57 Community Champion members. These organizations, coalitions, and individuals are committed to improving the lives of our keiki by advancing public policy changes that benefit children's health, safety, education, and economic security.

The Agenda contains 12 priorities for the 2024 Hawai'i State Legislative Session. These are the top priority issues of our Community Champion members.

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! (HCAN Speaks!) is a nonpartisan 501(c)4 nonprofit. Our movement is fighting to ensure all keiki are healthy, safe, and ready to learn. HCAN Speaks! gives Hawai'i parents and families the tools needed to make informed voting decisions, hold leaders accountable, and change systems and policies.

HCAN Speaks! respects the diversity, expertise, perspectives, and priorities within this community of advocates and is honored to advance the work of our peers in children's advocacy. HCAN Speaks! supports all of the items in the Agenda. Each initiative lists a lead organization that serves as the primary point of contact for advocacy.

View the Children's Policy Agenda online: <https://speaks.hawaii-can.org/agenda2024>

## Economic Security and Equity for Children

### **Paid Family Leave**

Provides working 'ohana with paid time off from work to care for and bond with a new keiki or to address caregiving needs for loved ones. The United States is the only developed country without national paid family leave. To fill that gap, thirteen states plus the District of Columbia have passed paid family leave laws. Hawai'i should join them. Here in Hawai'i, where most 'ohana are living paycheck to paycheck, it is critical that our state provide such support for our communities so that 'ohana are able to thrive and not just survive.

*Lead: Paid Leave Hawai'i Coalition*

### **Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit fix**

Last session, our lawmakers took an important first step to boost the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit. They more than quadrupled the maximum \*amount\* that taxpayers can claim for child and dependent care expenses, but they did not increase the maximum \*percent\* of care expenses that can be claimed, which makes it very difficult for families to access the full amount of the credit. This bill would increase the percent, allowing more taxpayers to benefit from the increase that lawmakers passed last session.

*Lead: Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!*

## **Child Care Worker Wage Supplement**

Establish a permanent wage supplement program to improve the recruitment and retention of early childhood care and education professionals and provide sustained state funding after federal relief funding ends.

To open more than 400 total classrooms over the next decade, we must be sure there are enough educators. We know that the low wages contribute to high turnover for early childhood care and education professionals. We look to follow the lead of other states and jurisdictions in supplementing wages with public investments. Other states have begun programs that provide public funding to supplement wages. They have seen marked improvements in retention metrics. There is also growing concern that the rapid expansion of public pre-k programs will impact staffing in community-based programs. If we work toward pay parity—via public funding—we will help stabilize these concerns and again increase retention across various program types. Finally, COVID-relief dollars must be spent by September 2024. Once the Hawai'i Department of Human Services spends the remaining \$40 million, there will be no more federal funding to subsidize the sector. We need state legislators to step in.

*Lead: Hawai'i Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance*

## **Child Tax Credit**

This legislation would create a state-level tax credit for families with children that will help to supplement the cost of raising a family in Hawai'i, regardless of whether they are paying for child care.

*Lead: Hawai'i Appleseed*

## **Removing Tuition Cap for Child Care Subsidies**

Set clear direction from the State Legislature that the Department of Human Services may provide payments above tuition rates for child care subsidies.

There has been what can be described as a “constructive cap” on payments to providers for both state-funded Preschool Open Doors (POD) and federally funded Child Care Connection Hawai'i (CCCH). This cap means that even when payment rates increase, providers would likely not be able to access those rates without increasing tuition rates for families not accessing subsidies. There has been consistent discussion about the increase of POD rates to \$1,500. However, the vast majority of POD providers would not be able to access the full payment amount without considering raising tuition rates across the board, which would have the heaviest impact on non-subsidy families.

*Lead: Hawai'i Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance*

# Pre-K to 12 Education

## **Universal Free School Meals**

Nutritious food is key to children's educational success and healthy growth and development. However, too many of Hawai'i's students in struggling households are not eligible for free meals. This legislation would extend free meals to every Hawai'i public school student, regardless of their eligibility for the federal free meal program.

*Lead: Hawai'i Appleseed*

## **Credentialing Requirements for School Psychologists**

Hawai'i is the only state in the nation that does not regulate its School Psychologists. As a result, individuals with inappropriate training can be hired into open School Psychologist positions. Requiring credentialing for School Psychologists guarantees that Hawai'i's children, youth, families, and schools have access to effective and high-quality school psychological services that adhere to national standards of practice.

*Lead: Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists*

# Health and Wellness for Children

## **Mental Health Awareness in Schools**

Youth recommendation from the 2023 Hawai'i Children and Youth Summit. Schools in Hawai'i should have a class that educates students about the importance and seriousness of mental health issues.

According to the 2021 Surgeon General's Advisory on Youth Mental Health, recent national surveys of young people have shown alarming increases in the prevalence of certain mental health challenges. 35% of middle and high school youth in Hawai'i experience persistent depression; 7% of high school and 11% of middle school students in Hawai'i reported having attempted suicide. 23% of middle school students report that their mental health was most of the time or always "not good" in the prior 30 days. Youth mental health issues are a risk factor for high-risk substance use.

The TeenLink Hawai'i website continues to get 2,000 site visits on average each month. The top topics/pages visited included Suicide; Health and Wellness Toolkit; Sleep; Stress; Mental Health; and Self-Care. A Hawai'i Department of Health report using 2020 data estimates that 11,000 of Hawai'i's youth experienced at least one major depressive episode in the prior year. Of those who experienced a major depressive episode, approximately 6,000 did not receive mental health services in the prior year.

*Lead: Hawai'i Youth Services Network*



## **End the Sale of All Flavored Tobacco Products**

Children and other young people are particularly attracted to the sweet flavors of electronic smoking device products. Ending the sale of flavored tobacco has been a proven and effective way to decrease the number of children who begin initiation.

*Lead: Hawai'i Public Health Institute*

## **Dental Hygienists Applying Dental Sealants in School-based Settings**

This proposal allows dental hygienists to apply dental sealants in school-based oral health programs under general supervision (i.e. dentist is not directly on-site) without an examination from the dentist. Hygienists are already trained and allowed to apply sealants under general supervision, but the efficiency and sustainability of school-based programs are hindered by the current administrative burdens which require added layers of clinical determination for applying sealants. These burdens limit the impact per site visit, and potentially adds burden on families to obtain follow up care that could otherwise be provided in the school setting.

*Lead: Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition (HOHC)*

# **Child Safety and Welfare**

## **Litigation Abuse Protection for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Dating Violence and Stalking**

The intention of this legislation is to stop abusive and controlling litigation - where an abuser will take a person, their friends and family to court over and over again, in order to control, harass, intimidate, coerce, and impoverish the survivor. Survivors with children are particularly susceptible to this practice through child custody battles.

The proposed legislation would give the courts the options to recognize and respond to controlling abusive litigation for domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking and dating violence survivors. If found to be an abusive litigant, the courts can order the financial compensation to survivors for lost wages, child care, transportation, court fees and attorneys fees. Additionally, abusive litigants will be subject to future prefiling requirements.

*Lead: Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence*

## Keiki Drowning Prevention

Legislation is needed to support Keiki Drowning Prevention because drowning is the leading cause of death for keiki 1-15 in Hawaii and yet no statewide support currently exists. This should include a Hawaii Water Safety Day to raise awareness as well as funding for aquatic safety lessons in DOE schools by a qualified nonprofit. In-school lessons are the only equitable, scalable way to teach keiki the lifetime skills they need to avoid drowning. Less than 2% of our second graders have these basic skills, and even less in Title 1 schools. A standards-based curriculum with lessons has already been used in individual schools on several islands. Aquatic safety should be the norm in Hawaii, similar to carseat and seatbelt safety.

*Lead: Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition*

## Community Champion Members

*Member list as of January 8, 2024.*

### Organizations

Aloha Diaper Bank	Hawai'i State PTSA
AlohaCare	Hawai'i State Teachers Association
Catalight Foundation	Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board
EPIC 'Ohana	Hawai'i Water Safety Coalition
Hālau Hula o Nāmamoakeakua	Hawai'i Youth Services Network
Hawai'i Afterschool Alliance	ISR O'ahu
Hawai'i Appleseed	Office of Councilmember Johnson
Hawai'i Association of School Psychologists	Outrigger Duke Kahanamoku Foundation
Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks!	Paid Leave Hawai'i Coalition
Hawai'i Coalition for Child Protective Reform	Parents for Public Schools of Hawai'i
Hawai'i Dental Service	Protective Makua
Hawai'i Diaper Bank	Puakalehua Early Learning Consortium
Hawai'i Early Childhood Advocacy Alliance	RAI Hawai'i
Hawai'i Oral Health Coalition	Raise Up Hawai'i
Hawai'i Public Health Institute	The Green Preschool Kailua
Hawai'i State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	
Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities	

### Individuals

Paula Adams	Jackie Jackson	Susie Chun Oakland	Anna Stone
Deborah Bond-Upson	Leilani Kupahu-Marino Kahoano	Quin Ogawa	Todd Taniguchi
Talia Cardines	Nina Ki	Amy Perruso	Jessica Wong-
Reid Chung	Caitlin Kryss	Robert Peters	Sumida
Regina Corniel	Terry Lock	Dana Senaha	Karen Worthington
Sarah Fairchild	Deb Marois	Jeannine Souki	
Jill Guillermo-Togawa	Maluhia ODonnell	Mariaailiana Stark	

# Take action today

**Become a Community Champion member** - [speaks.hawaii-can.org/communitychampions](https://speaks.hawaii-can.org/communitychampions)

You'll get exclusive advocacy tools, including custom action alerts, bill tracking, briefings on legislative hearings, sample testimony, media assistance, policy research, breaking news concerning children's issues, explanations of legislative/regulatory activity, and more.

*Sign up for free legislative action alerts -- [speaks.hawaii-can.org/updates](https://speaks.hawaii-can.org/updates).*

**Donate to this grassroots movement** - [speaks.hawaii-can.org/donate](https://speaks.hawaii-can.org/donate)

We can only advance the important initiatives in this Agenda with your support. Your gift today will help to address the root causes of poverty and inequity and develop these crucial public policies for our keiki.

Anyone interested in children's issues at the Legislature can sign up for action alerts on important bills. Your voice is needed — and we make it easy to get involved with our simple advocacy tools

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We are honored to be the convener and coordinator of the pro-keiki organizations, coalitions, and individuals who participated in this Agenda.



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