



HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON  
**FATHERHOOD**

HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON FATHERHOOD

**2018 Annual Report**

Submitted January 15, 2019

**2018 Voting Members**

Chairman, Richard Kebo

Vice-Chairman, Kāwika Riley

Kaua'i County Commissioner, Dan Kittredge

Maui County Commissioner, Kāwika Mattos

Hawai'i Island County Commissioner, Caleb Milliken

Hawai'i Coalition for Dads Rep., Alan Sunio

Aloha e nā lālā o ka ‘aha‘ōlelo kau kānāwai o Hawai‘i (Members of the Hawai‘i State Legislature),

On behalf of the members of the Hawai‘i State Commission on Fatherhood, thank you for the opportunity to present a concise summary of our 2018 calendar year activities. While not required by law nor requested by legislative resolution, the Commission offers this report for your consideration as you begin the 2019 regular legislative session. It is our hope that as you take up the daunting task of lawmaking once again, this short report of our activities will be of use to you as you make decisions that impact our state’s fathers and families.

While we remain a small, lesser-known state body, the Fatherhood Commission takes pride in our 2018 accomplishments. Following a loss of senior members and continued absence of staff support, we entered 2018 with several goals: get out into the community to hold meetings with fathers and men’s groups; take up the task of reviewing policies and policy proposals that impact families; determine our position on the important issue of paid parental leave; and improve the reach of our practice of sponsoring fatherhood events across the state. In addition to accomplishing each of these goals, we also adopted the beginnings of a strategic plan and an inventory of Hawai‘i’s fatherhood programs, both of which will guide our work in the coming year.

Now in the early weeks of 2019, we hope to continue to make progress. In reading on, you will find more information about our goals for this year. Should you have any questions, please contact our Chairman Richard Kebo at [rkebo@dhs.hawaii.gov](mailto:rkebo@dhs.hawaii.gov)

**‘O ka makua ke ko‘o o ka hale.**

*(The parent is the support that holds the household together.)*

Me ke aloha,



Richard Kebo  
Chairman (July 2018-Present)



Kāwika Riley  
Chairman (July 2017-June 2018;  
Vice Chairman July 2018- Present)

## **BACKGROUND**

The Hawai'i State Commission on Fatherhood is an all-volunteer commission established by the State for the purposes codified in Hawai'i Revised Statutes, Chapter 557-E. We serve in an advisory capacity to State agencies, and make recommendations on matters related to fathers, children, and families.<sup>1</sup> While administratively attached to the Department of Human Services, the Commission is independent in its analysis and decision making.

The Commission was established on a pilot basis in 2003, and made permanent four years later in 2007.<sup>2</sup> The Commission operates without staff, and receives assistance from the Office of Director of Human Services in fulfilling basic functions such as travel, fiscal processing, and securing meeting space.<sup>3</sup>

## **2018 ACTIVITIES**

As mentioned in our leadership's introduction, the Commission entered 2018 in the heels of change. In the summer of 2017 the Commission lost four of its members (out of seven members total), two of whom were longtime Commissioners, and one of whom was its Chairman. New Commissioners and a new Chairman were on-boarded over the summer and early fall. Following trainings and a review of our purpose, the Commission realized that we need to more narrowly focus on our unique role as a State body. This includes a need to shift away from some of the Commission's historic activities, such as holding contests and events. These activities are consistent with our mission, but now they are also being conducted by nonprofits and community organizations already.

While Commissioners saw that value of our legacy activities, it was also apparent that the focus on these events left fewer resources and less time for policy review, conducting research, promoting best practices, and holding outreach meetings and listening sessions. Therefore, we sought to find a strategy that would empower community organizations to hold these events with the support (but not necessarily the active participation) of the Commission, while we shifted towards tending to the purposes assigned to the Commission in our statute.

## **POLICY REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

While our lack of staff limits our capacity as volunteers who are all working fathers, we were able to review one major policy issue and several legislative proposals in the 2018 calendar year.

First, the Commission voted unanimously to support paid parental leave benefits throughout the State of Hawai'i. As our testimony on this issue mentioned, various studies in the U.S. and abroad have found that the months that immediately follow childbirth are critical for the health of the child, mother, and family. Additionally, a similarly rich and consistent range of data demonstrate that paternity leave is strongly correlated with more active parenting by fathers. Studies also show that paternity leave, as one would expect, facilitates more active father-to-

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<sup>1</sup> See HRS 577E-4

<sup>2</sup> The Commission was established via Act 156 (SLH 2003) and Act 190 (SLH 2007).

<sup>3</sup> The Commission is grateful to the DHS Director and his staff for all of their assistance throughout the year.

mother caregiving following the birth of the child. Our analysis of this issue in 2018 found overwhelming evidence of the value of this type of policy, now as much as ever.

Data also show that these benefits last long after paternity leave is over. In fact, the weeks immediately following childbirth appear to be an extraordinary window of opportunity where couples set their roles and habits as parents and partners. This includes fathers establishing their level of activity with their children. This is important because active fatherhood is associated with virtually every positive socio-economic outcome, including educational attainment, employment, physical wellbeing, lifestyle choices, and sense of self-worth. Indeed, facilitating active fatherhood may be one of the most powerful ways to improve the wellbeing of our State, and paid paternity leave may be the most helpful thing that State government can do empower fathers to make the right choice. While the Legislature did not pass paid parental leave legislation in 2018, our position remains that this is a missed opportunity, further aggravating the financial and other challenges faced by Hawai‘i’s families. We hope that the State will soon adopt a paid parental leave system. The Commission is available to provide analysis and recommendations on this issue.

In addition to adopting its position on paid parental leave and supporting specific paid parental leave legislation, the Commission also testified in support of several other measures related to fathers and families. These included measures for the establishment of visitation centers at state correctional facilities and jails and the State’s ‘Ohana Nui approach to anti-poverty. Looking forward to 2019, we hope to continue to provide testimony on measures that are closely related to fathers and families.

### **COMMUNITY MEETINGS**

Due to the lack of staff, most of the Commission’s meetings are “working meetings” where the Commissioners spend much of the meeting engaging in the regular operations of the Commission. While this is essential, the Commissioners have also noted that working meetings held at DHS headquarters are not the best way to solicit participation from members of the public. Prior to exiting the Commission, Chairman Carl Makino worked with partners to hold our first neighbor island outreach meeting, this time on the island of Kaua‘i in 2017. The Commission entered 2018 with the goal of holding an outreach meeting in each county by the end of 2018, and future meetings in other communities.

Thanks to the efforts of Maui County Commissioner Kawika Mattos and Hawai‘i County Commissioner Caleb Milliken, the Commission reached this goal by the summer of 2018. The Commissioners were impressed and informed by the testimony of fathers, mothers, children, service providers, attorneys, and other members of the public who attended these gatherings. The Commission sees a need to continue to mix our working meetings with these types of more open, listening-oriented community meetings. Our plans for 2019 include holding at least one community meeting on the neighbor islands, and another on the island of O‘ahu, in an area outside of Honolulu.

## **SPONSORING FATHERHOOD EVENTS**

Finally, the Commission increased its efforts to support nonprofits who conduct fatherhood events consistent with the Commission's purpose. As we shifted away from holding these events ourselves (in order to focus more on policy, research, and promotion of best practices), we saw a need to provide support for community organizations who want to highlight the importance of fathers in our homes and communities. Moving beyond the one sponsorship that the commission was able to provide for a fatherhood event celebration in 2017, it provided several sponsorships in 2018. This included a sponsorship to a nonprofit based in most of our State's counties.

At the time of submission of this report, the Commission is working to take up another round of sponsorships. While the sponsorships are limited, our goal is to help community organizations promote and celebrate fathers and families in a more meaningful way. If these organizations can have a greater impact that we have had by holding such events ourselves, this means that our shift towards focusing on our core statutory duties will only add to our impact. The Commission recognizes that supporting our fathers and families requires support at the State level as well as within local communities.

## **CONCLUSION**

In addition to reaching our goals for 2018, the Commission started working towards 2019 goals, and make progress in several instances. This included ending the year by adopting a broad outline of a strategic plan to guide our future efforts. Secondly, the Commission began to compile a list of Hawai'i organizations that provide fatherhood programs or otherwise offer resources for fathers and their families. This list, once complete, will serve as part of an information clearinghouse that we will make available to fathers and families.

The Commission is also partnering with others and seeking to understand what is happening in fatherhood policy nationally. One part of this has been renewing our attendance at least or more national fatherhood conference each year. We sent two commissioners to conferences in 2018 and plan to send at least one in 2019. These conferences are one part of our efforts to assemble a national network of colleagues doing public program and public policy work in family issues.

Lastly, we are working to complete an additional study on fatherhood issues in Hawai'i, following our successful 2015 report on the *State of Fathers in the State of Hawai'i*, produced in partnership with the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. We hope to add to this in 2019, and move the Commission towards being an efficient and effective state entity that contributes to the fathers and families of Hawai'i.

Should you have any questions, please contact our Chairman Richard Kebo at [rkebo@dhs.hawaii.gov](mailto:rkebo@dhs.hawaii.gov)