



HAWAI'I STATE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN
STATE OF HAWAI'I

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PILOT PROJECT FOR SINGLE MOMS OFFERS FREE THERAPY TO COPE WITH MENTAL HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID-19 AND SYSTEMIC SEXISM

Honolulu, Hawai'i — In commemoration of International Working Women's Day, the Hawai'i State Commission on the Status of Women and Samaritan Counseling Center Hawai'i will launch a pilot project, "Here for Her", to address the mental health consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on single mothers. The project is specially designed around sensitivity to gender inequality, and includes formal training to all SCCH staff and therapists on the unique systemic challenges that compound in the lives of single mothers and affect their mental health.

The project will prioritize women who participated in the Commission's June 2020 single mother survey and provide them with free or low cost, if insured and able to pay, counseling services that are gender sensitive. One of the urgent themes that emerged from the survey was the need for accessible mental health support due to the overwhelming burden and trauma of the crisis, especially lack of childcare. The project aims to help carry the psychological burden of the pandemic on single mothers, while continuing to advocate for policy and law changes that positively impact their ability to survive.

"We don't talk enough about the way sexism impacts mental health outcomes and access to resources. Prior to the pandemic, 80% of single mothers were unable to afford a barebones household budget. During the crisis, single mothers are finding it even harder to successfully parent and earn a sufficient living. The current approach treats single mothers as aberrations who should be pushed to remarry and work instead of receive structural support. It's time to pivot toward normalizing the free provision of basic necessities for women, including mental health support. Every single mom in Hawai'i needs to know that we are here for her," said Khara Jabola-Carolus, the Executive Director of the Commission.

Hawai'i House Majority Leader, Representative Della Au Belatti shared: "This pilot project highlights the importance of women's mental health and acknowledges the burdens that have been felt unevenly during this pandemic by the most vulnerable in our community. In a recent Hawai'i Department of Health survey, those who live with a child under 18 in their home were more likely to have experienced mental health issues over the last six months than were those who do not live with a minor. Among those who live in households that earn less than \$50,000, **91%** have experienced one *or more* of the

mental health issues over the last six months. With these kinds of partnerships, we can strengthen the resiliency of families and our communities by providing much needed assistance to single mothers. I commend the work being done by the Commission and SCCH to responding to the mental health needs of our residents.”

One of the single mothers from the Commission’s cohort, who wished to stay anonymous, stressed, “Mental health is extremely important. Maybe if I had gotten help sooner I would not be in my current crisis situation. Single mothers do not get adequate mental health or domestic violence support.”

Rachelle Chang, Executive Director of SCCH stated, “Samaritan Counseling Center Hawai‘i is thankful to the Hawai‘i State Commission on the Status of Women for focusing on the mental health and well-being of all women, and especially single mothers. With this innovative pilot program, single mothers in the CSW cohort will be able to receive the mental health counseling they need, from a compassionate, licensed counselor, regardless of their financial situation. Single mothers can learn skills to cope with anxiety, depression, parenting, relationship conflicts, and other challenges, to improve their lives and the lives of their children.”

SCCH offers professional and accessible mental health counseling for individuals, families, and communities in Hawai‘i. Counseling is non-religious, but can integrate spirituality if desired by the client. Staff counselors are licensed as psychologists, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, and mental health counselors.

The Commission has also introduced legislation this Session to permit telework for caregiving for working moms and to end housing discrimination against single mother households.

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