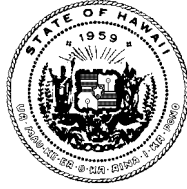


**JOSH GREEN, M.D.**  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



**CATHY BETTS**  
DIRECTOR  
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

**JOSEPH CAMPOS II**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

**STATE OF HAWAII**  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
P. O. Box 339  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

**TRISTA SPEER**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

January 11, 2024

The Honorable Ronald D. Kouchi, President  
and Members of the Senate  
Thirty-Second State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 409  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

The Honorable Scott K. Saiki, Speaker  
and Members of the House of  
Representatives  
Thirty-Second State Legislature  
State Capitol, Room 431  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

Dear President Kouchi, Speaker Saiki, and Members of the Legislature:

Enclosed is the following report submitted in accordance with Act 177, Session Laws of Hawaii 2018,  
The East Hawaii Child Welfare Services Pilot Project.

In accordance with section 93-16, HRS, the report is available to review electronically at the  
Department's website, at <https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/reports/legislative-reports/>.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Cathy Betts".

Cathy Betts  
Director

Enclosure

c: Governor's Office  
Lieutenant Governor's Office  
Department of Budget & Finance  
Legislative Auditor  
Legislative Reference Bureau Library (1 hard copy)  
Hawaii State Public Library, System State Publications Distribution Center (2 hard copies, one  
electronic copy)  
Hamilton Library, Serials Department, University of Hawaii (1 hard copy)

**REPORT TO THE THIRTY-SECOND HAWAII STATE  
LEGISLATURE 2024**

**IN ACCORDANCE WITH  
ACT 177, 2018 SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII  
THE EAST HAWAII CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PILOT PROJECT**

**Social Services Division  
Child Welfare Services Branch  
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES  
December 2023**

This report is submitted per provisions of Act 177, 2018 Session Laws of Hawaii 2018 (Act 177), related to the East Hawaii Child Welfare Pilot Project.

**I. Purpose**

In 2018, Act 177 established a five-year pilot project within the Department of Human Services (DHS) to ensure the safety and well-being of children who were at risk of abuse and neglect and their families in East Hawaii. Act 177 appropriated funds for four full-time caseworker positions, the associated administrative costs, and the costs to train this new staff.

**II. Act 177 (SLH 2018) Positions**

Although these four caseworker positions had been all filled at points during this pilot project, in State Fiscal Year (SFY) 2023, the positions were largely vacant. Two of the positions were vacant for the entire year. One position was filled for only the first nine days of SFY 2023. The fourth position was filled for the first four months of the state fiscal year but has been vacant since November 4, 2022.

East Hawaii CWS Section's November 2023 position inventory indicates a total of forty-four positions with nine vacancies. Although there are four fewer vacancies this year compared to its November 2022 position inventory, these vacancies affect family outcomes the most because eight of the nine vacancies are caseworker positions. Two Social Services Assistants in East Hawaii who meet the qualifications for caseworker positions are currently temporarily assigned to two of the caseworker vacancies to assist with the caseloads and gain skills and on-the-job training.

<b>Point-in-Time November</b>	<b>Total Number of Vacant Positions (both caseworker and non-caseworker positions)</b>
2019	5
2020	11
2021	9
2022	13
2023	9

**III. Caseload**

Likely due to the caseworker vacancies, there has been an increase in caseloads in East Hawaii over the past year. As of December 2023, the breakdown of cases managed ranges from 24 to 36 cases per permanency caseworker. This is a significant increase over the previous year, which was 15 to 24 cases per caseworker.

<b>Point-in-Time December</b>	<b>Average Caseloads for Permanency Caseworkers</b>
2019	10 – 22

<b>Point-in-Time December</b>	<b>Average Caseloads for Permanency Caseworkers</b>
2020	10 – 18
2021	10 – 18
2022	15 - 24
2023	24 - 36

Numerous variables impact caseworker caseloads, including new CWS program implementations, vacancy rates, efforts to improve relationships between CWS and the Judiciary, changes in CWS leadership, lasting COVID-19 impacts on health and economics, modifications to CWS procedures, media coverage of child abuse cases, changes in community access to resources, and recruitment efforts.

#### **IV. Findings of Performance and Employee Satisfaction Evaluations**

Although challenged by high caseloads and vacancies, caseworkers have maintained monthly visits to children, adoptions are being processed, complaints about staff have decreased, and the Family Court imposed only one financial sanction during calendar year (CY) 2023.

DHS surveyed East Hawaii CWS staff in 2022 to measure the change in satisfaction due to the size of their caseload and the effects on staff performance, satisfaction, and attrition.

Thirty-six individuals completed the staff survey in 2022. Of those respondents, twelve staff had worked at Child Welfare Services for 11-35 years. Additionally, 55% of staff (20 individuals) planned on remaining with CWS for at least the next five years.

A survey question asked whether they felt a reduction in their workload/caseload between January 2020 and January 2022. Three caseworkers indicated they felt there was a reduction in caseload. The remaining thirty-three respondents did not feel a reduced workload/caseload.

When asked about changes to improve the CWS work environment for staff, the East Hawaii staff shared the following suggestions:

- hire more staff,
- raise salaries,
- add more specialist positions,
- improve office space,
- allow more teleworking,
- implement shortage differential pay,
- improve in-person meetings and training,
- create additional units,
- eliminate hiring freeze, and

- add a higher level for support staff (level V).

**V. Court Sanctions for Late Reports**

Calendar Year (CY)	Number of Court Sanctions
2013	2
2014	0
2015	0
2016	1
2017*	5
2018	21
2019	6
2020	0
2021	5
2022	0
2023^	1

\*September to December 2017 information is based on supervisors' recollection.

^In CY 2023, the CWS East Hawaii Section was sanctioned once by the court due to a late court report. In addition, in CY 2023, due to late court reports or other concerns (e.g., lack of consistent contact with the family), the family court issued an Order to Show Cause (OSC) to the East Hawaii Section approximately five times.

**VI. Legal Claims**

Currently, there are three active civil lawsuits stemming from cases in East Hawaii; two cases were previously included in prior legislative reports.

CY	Total Number of Litigated Cases~
2019	2
2020	2
2021	1
2022	2
2023	3

~The total number of cases may be duplicated cases that carry over to the following year.

**VII. Additional Comments**

Anecdotal evidence from CWS staff at all levels, community members, social service agency staff, employees from other State agencies, and family court representatives strongly suggests that when these additional caseworker positions are filled, cases are better managed, and children and families have better outcomes. The struggle is in filling the positions and retaining the staff.