

TO: Members of the City Council

FROM: Jennifer Norton  
Program Manager, Youth Services

RE: Bill 13 (2015), CD 2

DATE: June 2, 2015

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These comments are submitted in support of Bill 13/CD 2 and funding for a Grant-in-Aid to Easter Seals Hawaii (ESH). As Program Manager of the Youth Services Program at ESH, I have direct and first-hand knowledge of the impact of services and supports provided to youth with special needs.

Children and youth with special needs generally grow into adults who still have special needs. While this may be unavoidable, it **does not mean** that these children and youth will grow up to be unemployed and dependent on others. Early introduction of life skills have been shown to positively impact youth with special needs when it comes to cognitive development, quality of life and general well-being. Further, intensive pre-vocational skill building has been shown to positively affect a young adult's ability to enter the workforce and live a productive, self-sustaining life.

This fall, the Youth Enrichment Program at ESH, plans to provide intensive pre-vocational training to youth with special needs between the ages of 14 and 22 yrs. in a unique and proactive manner. We expect to reach 25 youth across Oahu in Honolulu, Kapolei, and Kailua.

With this new activity, we plan to not only enroll participants in the training, but pay them to attend and learn new skills. The youth will be expected to show up on time, exhibit motivation to learn, and finish the minimum number of hours to complete their coursework. In turn, ESH will respect their time and efforts with a fair paycheck. Throughout 6 weeks of coursework and real life application, participants will learn not only job skills, but interpersonal skills, interview techniques, self-discipline, and team work. They will be expected to explore the job market and with support from ESH, seek out and build relationships with employers as prospective internship sites. After completion of their course work, ESH will help each youth establish a meaningful internship in their community and we will support them in applying their new vocational skills. In order to make the employer/employee relationship as successful as possible, ESH vocational staff will also provide guidance to the employer on how to support an employee with special needs.

ESH respectfully requests \$127,982 so that we may fully implement this new and exciting program. Thanks you for your continued support.