

I am honored to have this opportunity to provide testimony in Support of Surfrider Spirit Sessions and their application for their Grant in Aid for \$75,000 from the City Council.

I participated as a mentor in Surfrider Spirit Sessions from 2012-2014 (when I took a job on the mainland). I witnessed the Surfrider Spirit Session provide at risk kids the opportunity to have a relationship with a mentor and a group that built their self-esteem, hope, vision of themselves and possibilities based on their actions and decisions. Many of the kids I mentored or met during the program came from families who were struggling in some way and the Surfrider Spirit Session program and mentors provided them with an alternate view of life and an alternate model that they could choose to follow. A very unique and important component of The Surfrider Spirit Sessions program is the interaction with the nature and the ocean. The aesthetic and transformative properties of nature and the ocean in particular enhances the mentor-mentee relationship, the connection of the group and is a meaningful and powerful physical metaphor for many of the life skills and attitudes these young people need to make healthy life decisions as they move forward in their life. Another unique aspect of Surfrider Spirit Sessions is the program incorporates volunteering, giving back to the community through beach cleanups. Not only does the program practice community values of leaving no trace (which models ethical citizenship to the teens in the program) but also allows them to have the satisfying experience of caring for our community and natural resource.

RECEIVED
CITY CLERK
C & C OF HONOLULU

2015 JAN - 30 AM 7: 52

During the time I volunteered with Surfrider Spirit Sessions I had an opportunity to meet and visit with several of the kids caseworkers during program sessions. I was so impressed by their perspective on the program and the benefit it provided to the kids involved. They shared that the kids more often than not begin to make better choices, become more engaged at school and their self-esteem begins to grow as they feel empowered, and they realize they are worthwhile individuals.

In summary, I feel the grant to this program is a bargain, an excellent investment for the returns that I have personally witnessed that it provides for our young adults and our communities. Hawaii as with the rest of our country is plagued by social ills that occur with teenagers from drug use, increasing high school dropout rates, homelessness, teen pregnancy, etc that begins with patterns and choices often made during the teenage years. I firmly believe, in part because of my experiences with Surfrider Spirit Sessions, that grassroots programs such as this, that bring adult and teens together in our communities is what will make the difference and change the course of many of these kids lives and then ultimately our communities. If we want change we have to support it. Finally, in closing I would like to say that Surfrider Spirit Session taught me a great deal as a volunteer and I have taken what I have learned to my new community where I am now participating in a similar program. Surfrider Spirit Sessions not only gives to the kids it serves but helps develop and inspire adult mentors! This program gives back tenfold in developing healthy kids and growing more mentors to increase our programs and even others.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide my testimony!

Regards, Laura L. Williams