

Hawaii Family Forum (HFF) MEMOs

May 5, 2001

**Mahalo for your
involvement
during the 2001
Legislative Session!**

Hawaii Family Forum is a non-profit, pro-family education organization committed to preserving and strengthening families in Hawaii.

While locally governed and supported, HFF is associated with Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family.

As a non-profit organization, gifts to HFF are tax deductible. (And Appreciated!)

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2001 Legislature Adjourns Age of Consent Bill Passes Legislature

Hawaii would no longer have the lowest age of consent in the nation under a bill passed by both the House and Senate in the last week of the 2001 legislative session. Raising Hawaii's age of consent was Hawaii Family Forum's number one legislative agenda item during the 2001 session.

In a bi-partisan vote, members of the House and Senate unanimously agreed to raise Hawaii's age of consent from 14 to 16. Passage of the measure represents a huge victory for Hawaii's families and children.

Many capitol observers were stunned by the bill's passage because of the unrelenting opposition by the bill's opponents including Honolulu Prosecutor Peter Carlisle, the Sex Abuse Treatment Center, the Women's Coalition and many other organizations and individuals with considerable legislative clout.

Involvement from members of the public made all the difference on this issue as legislators worried about the potential political repercussions of voting against a higher age of consent. While passage of the bill is an important step forward, certain aspects of the bill are less than optimal. The key provisions are as follows:

- The bill prohibits adults from having so-called consensual sexual relations with 14 or 15 year-old minors if the adult is at least 5 years older and not married to the minor.
- The bill 'Sunssets' in 2 years. Unfortunately, this means the law will have to be passed again during the 2003 legislative session.
- The bill creates a task force to study the effectiveness of the law. Hawaii Family Forum is named as a task force participant.

One Final Hurdle – Governor's Approval Uncertain

One significant concern remains: Governor Ben Cayetano may veto the bill. The bill's opponents are likely to push for a veto and the Governor has previously expressed reservations about raising the age of consent.

Age of Consent Bill Passes Legislature - Governor's Approval Uncertain

The Governor's reservations concern mandatory penalties associated with raising the age of consent. HB236 does provide for harsh mandatory penalties for adults who sexually exploit minors.

Hawaii Family Forum believes this is appropriate because it is the adults in the community who should bear the responsibility of ensuring their sex partners are not minors.

It is the adults who must be held accountable for their actions – for the sexual exploitation of Hawaii's minors. Additionally, because the Prosecutor has shown such strong opposition to the measure, overzealous prosecution can't be cited as a serious concern.

The Governor has 45 days to either sign or veto the bill. If he takes no action, it will become law without his signature. If it is vetoed, we will be back to square one next legislative session because a legislative override of the veto is virtually impossible.

ACTION NEEDED

- Please pray that Governor Cayetano will sign this legislation into law.
- Please contact the Governor's office at 586-0034 and politely encourage him to support raising Hawaii's age of consent to better protect our youth from adult sexual exploitation. (HB 236)

Mahalo for your support! We could never have gotten this far without your involvement!

Gambling Efforts Stopped Sure to Resurface

Hawaii will remain one of only three states in the United States with no form of legal commercial gambling, at least for this year. Despite the efforts of mainland gambling interests, legislators once again resisted the urge to legalize gambling as a 'quick fix' to the state's budget and economic woes.

Legislators faced even stronger lobbying efforts this year by out-of-state casino owners who spent tens of thousands of dollars on full-page newspaper ads and telephone polls.

Toward the end of session, the Senate appeared poised to pass a resolution establishing a 'study commission' to examine the likely economic impact of legalized gambling in Hawaii. However, under intense pressure from local gambling opponents, including HFF, the Senate Health Committee killed the resolution.

Lawmakers have warned gambling opponents that we must mobilize for an all-out assault next year. As always, we will keep you posted on the latest developments in this area.

Many More Bills Died Some Good, Some Bad

Parental Notification for Abortion

For the first time in many years, pro-life legislation actually received several public hearings in the state Senate. SB 809 would have required parental notification before a minor obtains an abortion. SB 809 passed both the Senate Health and Judiciary Committees. However, in a bizarre procedural move prompted by pro-abortion advocates, the Judiciary Committee reconsidered its earlier action and killed the bill.

Physician Assisted Suicide and Death

Pro-life, health care and disabilities rights organizations were pleased the issue of legalizing physician-assisted suicide and death did not even receive a single public hearing. Pro-suicide forces will certainly try again next year.

Same-Sex Marriage also known as Civil Unions

Despite the disproportionate press coverage of a small number of activists, legislators were in no mood to re-open the same sex marriage debate through discussion of a civil unions proposal. However, this, too, we shall see again.

On the whole, this was a terrific session for HFF and we want to say mahalo to all of you who got involved. You made a real difference for Hawaii's children and families!