



Hawaii Gov. Josh Green Signs Bill to Strengthen Protections for Children

HB 781 hailed as an important step in adopting human rights standards for kids in Hawaii

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Honolulu, HI — House Bill 781 by Rep. John Mizuno (D-Honolulu) was signed into law this week by Governor Josh Green. HB 781 puts into law strengthened protections for children who are facing interrogation by law enforcement by requiring that the child consult with the parent or guardian and an attorney before the child can waive their rights or be interrogated by police.

HB 781 is the product of a years-long effort by Rep. Mizuno, who is also a board member of Human Rights for Kids. Mizuno and James Dold, Founder and CEO of HRFK, began their work on this important piece of legislation in 2019. Despite initial setbacks, Rep. Mizuno continued to champion this important human rights legislation.

The protections offered by this new law are critically important to insulate children from giving false confessions to law enforcement. Research shows that children are particularly susceptible to giving false confessions because they are not as sophisticated as adults when interacting with the criminal justice system and being interrogated by law enforcement. Children rarely have an understanding of the consequences and implications of law enforcement interrogations on their due process rights and the impact they may have during trial.

According to a report from the National Registry of Exonerations on people who were wrongfully convicted, nearly all of the children under the age of 14 had falsely confessed. Similarly, nearly 60 percent of 14 and 15-year-old children in the same situation gave a false confession.

Emily Virgin, Director of Advocacy & Government Relations at HRFK said, “We are honored to have worked with Rep. Mizuno, who has long been an incredible advocate for children all across Hawaii, and we are thankful for his hard work and the willingness of the Hawaii State Legislature to address this important human rights issue. The passage of this legislation also

would not have been possible without the dedicated advocates on the ground who organized and supported this bill for several years. The Governor’s approval of HB 781 sends a powerful message – that children should be protected and treated differently than adults at every stage of the criminal justice process.”

“This is a great bill ensuring that Constitutional due process rights apply to children as well as to adults and that due process of law is the primary and indispensable foundation of individual freedom” said Kat Brady, Coordinator at Hawaii-based Community Alliance on Prisons. “Kids have rights too!” she emphasized.

Rep. Mizuno noted "Hawaii becomes the seventh state in the nation to pass a significant piece of legislation to protect the constitutional rights of kids in the justice system. The impossible becomes possible when it is the right thing to do.”

Similar laws have recently been enacted in other states, including California, Maryland, Virginia, and Utah. Along with North Dakota and Washington, these six states receive full credit for due process protections for children in HRFK’s [State Ratings Report](#).

“In recent years, the State of Hawaii has become a trendsetter when it comes to recognizing kids as kids, and we couldn’t be happier to be celebrating another milestone with the passage of HB 781,” Virgin concluded.

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- **ABOUT HUMAN RIGHTS FOR KIDS**
- Human Rights for Kids is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion and protection of the human rights of children. We use an integrated, multi-faceted approach which consists of research & public education, coalition building & grassroots mobilization, and policy advocacy & strategic litigation to advance critical human rights on behalf of children in the United States and around the world. We work to protect children from harm; reform justice systems to ensure society focuses on rehabilitating children who come into conflict with the law; protect immigrant, non-native children from harm and discrimination; promote access to quality education for all children; and promote healthy communities for children to ensure access to housing and health care.