



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

919 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 101 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V/TDD) • Fax (808) 586-8129

April 18, 2008

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC HOUSING

House Concurrent Resolution 150, HD1 – Requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau to Study the Feasibility of Establishing a Comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Individuals

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Concurrent Resolution 150, HD1 which requests the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct a feasibility study regarding the establishment of a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing in Hawaii.

The mission of the State Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division is to place people with disabilities into substantial gainful employment in the community. Employment often reflects how an individual feels about being productive, contributing back to society, and pursuing personal goals in life. In order to become successfully employed, an individual needs basic communication skills. People who are deaf or hard of hearing often do not have communication skills comparable to the average hearing population.

Establishing a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for people who are deaf and hard of hearing takes into regard the communication barriers faced by deaf and hard of hearing people on a daily basis, and attempts to remove it by hiring staff fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) and who understand Deaf culture. Such a center would be comparable to the current Ho'opono services for individuals who are blind or who have low vision. Staff with ASL communication skills would make vocational evaluation, independent living skills training, and vocational training more effective for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

Developing a center will represent a significant change in the way that services are delivered and will likely require a re-organization and shift in staff. Therefore, a feasibility study of establishing a center, along with defining an appropriate model is important.

We urge your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

PATRICIA M. NIELSEN
Chairperson
Legislative Committee

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director

APRIL 18, 2008

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND PUBLIC HOUSING

House Concurrent Resolution 150 – Requesting the Legislative Bureau to Study the Feasibility of
Establishing a Comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Center for the Deaf and Hard of
Hearing Individuals

The Deaf Hard of Hearing Advisory Board of the State Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division strongly supports the House Concurrent Resolution 150 which requests the Legislative Reference Bureau to conduct a feasibility study regarding the establishment of a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

The mission of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is to place people with disabilities into substantial gainful employment in the community. The deaf and hard of hearing people however, have a real problem because of the lack of basic communications with the hearing population. Consequently they cannot access the services of other resources in the community directly because of communications issues. Furthermore, they desperately need more comprehensive services to learn daily living skills, improve English language competency, explore vocational options; understand what is expected of employees and how to plan for employment. The comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center would give them a much better opportunity through guidance classes to find and maintain gainful employment. I have said this many times in this capitol in the past 25-26 years, "helping our deaf and hard of hearing young people today will pay dividends in the future when they become productive tax paying citizens instead of being of depending on the government.

At this point, deaf and hard of hearing people are underserved. The feasibility study of a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center will be the first step toward better services. Once we have the need documented, we can make recommendations for the expansion of services. I don't want to base the justification on comparison with the blind, but they are offered so much more compared to the deaf. At Ho'opono they have 42 positions serving the blind, while at VR we have 5 positions servicing the deaf and hard of hearing. That never did make a lot of sense to me but I always understood why. As I've said many times before you can see the blind person but, you cannot see the deaf person so it's easier for legislators to understand the problems and needs of the blind, but difficult to understand the problems and needs of the deaf. That's my personal opinion.

I ask for this committee's support of HCR 150, HD1.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

ART FRANK
Chairperson
Deaf Hard of Hearing Advisory Board

NOTE: DUE TO MEDICAL REASONS I AM UNABLE TO ATTEND TODAY'S HEARING.