

LATE TESTIMONY

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THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2008 at 9:30 a.m.
House Conference Room 329

**TESTIMONY
TO COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES AND HOUSING
ON
HCR 150, REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU
TO STUDY THE FEASIBILITY OF ESTABLISHING
A COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS**

Aloha, Chair Rep. Maile Shimabukuro, Vice-Chair Rep. Karl Rhoads, Members, and Friends:

My name is Francine Kenyon. I am a long-time advocate and volunteer consultant for deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind people of the State of Hawaii.

I strongly support in intent of HCR 150, requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau to study the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, because of 3 important reasons: (1) full independence; (2) provision of better quality of services and on-the-job training programs; and (3) civil rights as first-class citizens.

Kuli Ike KOKUA is a private volunteer-based, woman-owned business that include consulting, teaching, fostering and promoting full independence, providing technical assistance, and so forth. The goal of Kuli Ike KOKUA is to help deaf people achieve their dreams that will lead them to successful careers and to ensure themselves of their civil rights as mandated by Americans with Disabilities Act, Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other federal and state laws.

What is "comprehensive"? "Comprehensive" means "full, complete, and all-inclusive." Similar like Filipino Community Center in Waipahu, Ho'opono for Blind, and Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, it would be excellent for us to have the one-stop center with bistro café, coffee shop, bookstore, beauty shop, tutorial center, fully accessible video conference room, small theater, swimming pool, and many places to shop where deaf and hard-of-hearing people can work and serve both deaf and hearing people in the entire community. Like Gallaudet University, many deaf and hard-of-hearing people work in bookstore or bistro or cafeteria as stock clerks, managers, or accountants.

With the comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for deaf and hard-of-hearing, they can provide on-the-job training as cashiers, beauticians, waiters/waitresses, computer technicians, lifeguards, and even manager or supervisor. This will help deaf and hard-of-hearing become fully independent, financially stable, and first-class citizens.

I would support if the Legislative Reference Bureau could work closely in a teamwork with the Vocational Rehabilitation division in gathering all the information from the agencies serving the deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind individuals.

Historically, Hawaii Services on Deafness (HSOD) began its interpreter referral and personal adjustment services for the deaf and hard of hearing consumers in 1980 and was funded by the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Aloha United Way. HSOD had tirelessly been instrumental in providing full independence among deaf and hard-of-hearing people. In 2002, HSOD gave up the personal adjustment services to Goodwill Industries, Inc. Four years later, the VR contract was transferred from Goodwill Industries, Inc. to Hawai'i Center on Independent Living (HCIL) because the personal adjustment services for deaf and hard of hearing provided by Goodwill Industries, Inc. were very expensive.

Mahalo nui loa for allowing me to testify on this important bill.

Sincerely,

Francine Aona Kenyon
Deaf Advocate & Consultant