



## CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TO: Senator Brian Taniguchi, Chair  
Senator David Y. Ige, Vice Chair  
Committee on Commerce, Consumer Protection and Affordable Housing (CPH)

FROM: Melba Bantay, Program Director

DATE: Friday, February 8, 2008 (9:00 a.m., Room 219)

RE: **SB3197, Relating to Immigration Consultants**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on SB3197, Relating to Immigration Consultants. I am Melba Bantay, Program Director of Immigrant Services at Catholic Charities Hawaii. Catholic Charities Hawaii is a private, 501 (c)(3) organization that has been providing services for immigrants since 1980.

We are in **support of the intent** of Senate Bill 3197 which is to ensure professional immigration services. However, we **recommend that “Individuals accredited by the Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA)” be added to the list of “persons not covered.”**

Non profit, religious, charitable, social service or similar organizations, established in the United States and recognized as such by the U.S. Department of Justice, Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA), under Title 8, Code of Federal Regulations (C.F.R.) Section 1292.2(a) may apply for accreditation of persons of good moral character as its representatives. These BIA-accredited individuals are allowed to provide limited representation of an organization's clients before the Department of Homeland Security's Citizenship and Immigration Service alone (with partial Accreditation) or before the Service and the Board of Immigration Appeals, which includes practice before Immigration judges.

In order to be recognized by the BIA, organizations must establish to the satisfaction of the Board that:

- (1) It makes only nominal charges and assesses no excessive membership dues for persons given assistance; and
- (2) It has at its disposal adequate knowledge, information and experience.

Catholic Charities Hawaii's Honolulu, Hilo and Kona offices are recognized by the BIA. Four Catholic Charities Hawaii employees have been granted partial accreditation by the BIA, allowing them to practice before the DHS (Citizenship and Immigration Service).

With the BIA recognition of its offices and accreditation of its employees, Catholic Charities Hawaii is able to provide low cost services to encourage immigrants on a legal path to naturalization and family reunification. All fees collected go back to the program to support the



provision of low cost immigration services for other immigrants. Please note that this immigration work by Catholic Charities Hawaii is not supported by any governmental source.

Please be aware that Catholic Charities Hawaii is one of several social service agencies that are recognized by the Board of Immigration Appeals and have BIA-accredited employees who are not attorneys by training or profession.

Without the addition of the recommended language, many immigrants will experience extreme financial hardship. Furthermore, the lack of immigration attorneys practicing on the neighbor islands will force neighbor island immigrants to make numerous and costly trips to Honolulu in order to complete their applications.

**Catholic Charities Hawaii asks for your support of SB 3197, Relating to Immigration Consultants, with the addition of the recommended language.**

If I can provide any further information, please feel free to contact me via phone at 808-528-5233, ext. 120, or via email at [mbantay@catholiccharitieshawaii.org](mailto:mbantay@catholiccharitieshawaii.org). **Thank you.**