



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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April 17, 2008

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT

Senate Concurrent Resolution 37, SD1 – 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 Senate Concurrent Resolution 37, SD1 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 have no objections to amendments proposed in SD1.

We urge your favorable consideration of this measure.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

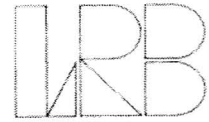
Respectfully submitted,

PATRICIA M. NIELSEN
Chairperson
Legislative Committee

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LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU
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COMMENTS ON SCR37, SD1

REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU TO STUDY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTER FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS

Comments by the Legislative Reference Bureau
Ken H. Takayama, Acting Director

Presented to the House Committee on Legislative Management

Thursday, April 17, 2008, 3:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309

Chair Magaoay and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on S.C.R. No. 37, S.D. 1. The Bureau does not take any position for or against this measure, but offers the following comments.

The resolution directs the Bureau to study the feasibility of establishing a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for deaf and hard of hearing individuals.

In its present form, the study requested appears to be manageable in scope. It is also essentially identical to H.C.R. No. 150, H.D. 1, on the same subject.

We will endeavor to work with the Legislature to produce a study that is informative and useful.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit our comments.

APRIL 17, 2008

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT

Senate Concurrent Resolution 37SD1 – 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 Senate Concurrent Resolution 37 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 on welfare, SSI, etc.

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 in this building many times, "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 realize some of my friends at the Hawaii Center on Independent Living (HCIL) are against this resolution because they don't see the need for it. I disagree because Independent Living is not the only service our community needs as I've pointed out.

I ask for this committee's support of SCR 37, SD1

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

ART FRANK
Chairperson
Deaf Hard of Hearing Advisory Board

NOTE: I WILL NOT BE ABLE TO ATTEND TODAY HEARINGS DUE TO A MEDICAL PROBLEM.

Francine Aona Kenyon
dba KULI IKE KOKUA
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Thursday, April 17, 2008 at 3:00 pm in Conference Room 309

**TESTIMONY TO HOUSE COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE MANAGEMENT
ON
SENATE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION #37, SENATE DRAFT # 1,
REQUESTING THE LEGISLATIVE REFERENCE BUREAU
TO STUDY THE ESTABLISHMENT OF
A COMPREHENSIVE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION CENTER
FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING INDIVIDUALS**

Aloha, Chair Representative Michael Magaoay, Vice-Chair James Tokioka, Members, and Friends:

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

I strongly support Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 37, Senate Draft No. 1, requesting the Legislative Reference Bureau to study the establishment of a comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Center for Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals, because of 3 important reasons: (1) employment; (2) productive life; and (3) communication access.

The purpose is to have the comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center as one-stop center for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. Similar like Filipino Community Center in Waipahu, Ho'opono for Blind, and Gallaudet University in Washington, DC, the comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center can be an excellent place as a one-stop center with bistro café, coffee shop, bookstore, beauty shop, tutorial center, fully accessible video conference room, small theater, swimming pool, and, even Sprint Relay store. This would give a good opportunity for deaf and hard-of-hearing people to get full job training as cashiers, tellers, beautician, waiter/waitress, audio-visual technicians, lifeguards, and, even, manager or supervisor, or sales associate for Sprint. National Association of the Deaf headquarter in Silver Spring, Maryland is a good example, too, because it has the bookstore, coffee café, conference rooms, and offices where we deaf and hard-of-hearing people could go for information and referrals on deafness-related issues, work in offices, or do business there. This will definitely help deaf and hard-of-hearing become fully independent and have financial freedom with good self-esteem as first-class citizens in this state. .

A few years ago, we did have a feasibility study on the community center for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals with City and County of Honolulu Community Services

during the administration of Mayor Jeremy Harris. We still have a long struggle of getting this community center for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals be initiated and established. We feel it is very important for us to have such a comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation center for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

Last May, we had a Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Advisory Board meeting with Rehabilitation Services Administration, U.S. Department of Education. Thus, RSA recommended us to have a feasibility study on a comprehensive vocational rehabilitation center for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals.

Therefore, I strongly urge you to passing this important resolution, Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 37, Senate Draft No. 1 for Legislative Reference Bureau to help us do the study to establish such a center.

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

Sincerely,

Francine Aona Kenyon
Deaf Advocate & Consultant