

## COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

### TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT

DATE: Wednesday, February 4, 2009

TIME: 9:00 a.m.

PLACE: Conference Room 325

State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

Dear Chair Jon Riki Karamatsu, Vice Chair Ken Ito and members of JUD  
My name is Jessica Lani Rich and I am the President & Executive Director of the Visitor Aloha Society of Hawaii, also known as VASH for short. We are a non-profit agency dealing with visitors in emergency situations.

**I am testifying relating to House Bill 1187 and I am in favor of this bill.** The reason I support this bill is that our office provides assistance to hundreds of visitors in crisis every year. We deal with visitors who are victims of crimes, which include having their car broken into; to visitors who even die while they are on vacation for numerous reasons. Our office is contacted on a regular basis by people who started out as visitors but then became homeless. Many of these visitors have children and find themselves in homeless shelters.

The Visitor Aloha Society does not purchase airline tickets for visitors. Visitors must have a round-trip ticket to qualify for our services but most people don't know that so they call us for help. Our office has been asked for assistance from 18 year old young women who respond to jobs on the internet and when they get here the work was not what they expected. They come from families who cannot afford to send them back home so they become homeless. We fear that these young women could land up on the streets as prostitutes if they are not helped with airline tickets. Our office has also been asked to assist families who come to Hawaii on vacation and don't buy a round trip ticket, if they are robbed, they also land up in a homeless shelter. Another common problem is visitors who go online for vacation rentals and will pay hundreds of dollars only to find out that they have no place to stay. These people also land up homeless.

A most recent case we assisted involved a 79 year old man who came here as a visitor with no round-trip ticket. If there were funds available, he could have been sent home to his family.

If the state could help out many people who are in homeless shelters by buying them a ticket home, not only is it a humane thing to do but it is also very cost effective. We are in the front line helping visitors in crisis who said if they could only have a ticket home it would solve their problem of homelessness and isolation. Many have a better life waiting for them back home.

I am in support of House Bill 1187 because it assists the homeless in reuniting with their family members. They would not have to suffer if they had plane tickets. On behalf of the Visitor Aloha Society of Hawaii, I thank you.

Submitted by Jessica Lani Rich, President & Executive Director  
Visitor Aloha Society of Hawaii, Waikiki Shopping Plaza, 2250 Kalakaua Avenue Suite  
403-3  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96815  
Telephone: 808-926-8274  
Fax: 808-926-0500

Dear Re. Cabanilla:

I was unable to attend or send testimony to the hearing on HB 1187 which allocates \$75,000 to help return individuals to the mainland.

There is a scheduled hearing on Friday with JUD - it is also open for testimony, I assume? please let know.

In general, as someone who has worked in homeless services for the past 7 years in Hawaii - I strongly do NOT support this people for reasons:

- 1) There are sufficient funds (from client's own or other assistance) to help homeless individuals return to the mainland- this already happens. The only barriers to "sending back" do not want to return. Those that do - find a way and usually have their own money. I work with several agencies and this already happens when needed
- 2) The policy implications and unintended consequences of this bill are many: 1) Will you ban people from travelling back to Hawaii if they have used tax money to return previously to the mainland- if they get themselves in this problem again? I know of a family of 6 that want to return to Arizona - are you willing to be \$2,000+ for the whole family. Do you want to create more of an incentive for people to come here without means to return or a plan?
- 3) Considering that the established programs in homeless services are not running at great efficiency and there are massive budget cuts in place - this is not a good time for new "untested programs". HPHA stipend contracts already allow funds to be used for these purposes at the discretion of the agency. But again, the clients usually have it - that is not the core problem.

I was at the original housing discussion led by Re. Cabanilla and I understand that she is trying to get creative about the problem and I appreciate it. But this is the not the main problem - or even one of the top 10 problems.

Homeless providers will of course support it - cause its more money - more money - again that is not the issue.

One creative and simple thing that Rep Cabanilla could do is:

MANDATE that all State-funded shelters have a minimum monthly program fee for entry of \$75- from Day One - that can be waived with documentation - that is a better way to triangulate the system - and with the extra money - providers can use it at their discretion (as they already can) to help people with specific needs like family reunification. And MANDATE that outreach agencies begin to charge for services like MAIL PICK-UP - agencies like Care-A-Van offer a free MAIL service for over 1,000 clients - they can pay a yearly \$25 fee - and then the agency can use that money at its discretion for those in need.

If Rep. Cabanilla wants to make her mark - she can insist on no FREE services - unless there is absolutely no money to pay - which is only about 10 to 20%. It works. The homeless have some money - and they can pay a fair share for services.

Actually the ample outreach services we give works to keep them on the streets and parks in Hawaii more than anything else - especially when there are opportunities to move into shelter and they choose not to. They can stay - but let them pay some fee for services.

Thank you -

The Honorable Rida Cabanilla

The Honorable Lynn Finnagan

**Hawaii State Legislature - House of Representatives**

Greetings(Aloha),

I am a Systems Engineer, Independent Researcher and Veteran. A recent report(Niesse) finds that Hawaii has an increasingly large homeless population; 61% are native Hawaiians. However, a bill is working its way through the legislature (HB 1187) to repatriate some originally from the mainland back to where they supposedly came from. A one-way airfare ticket is cheaper than the cost of entering them into the welfare system.

However, unemployment in Hawaii rose 139% [from 2.3% (Dec 2006) to 5.5% (Dec 2008)] compared to a 63% increase [from 4.4 to 7.2] across the US (BLS). Yes, the economy is poor and Hawaii's is getting worse. Their increase in homelessness is likely related to their own tourism based economy rather than challenged individuals from the mainland invading Hawaii for the temperate climate as claimed.

True "homelessness" is related to mental illness, dysfunctional family environments(Herman), resultant childhood and job/war related stress, memory problems(Brown), and attention deficits. They are much less likely have family to go home to. They are hard pressed to remember where they were yesterday, much less where they really came from. However, they would enjoy the change in scenery and .....the airplane ride. Yes, airlines benefit from this homeless shuffle.

I am particularly concerned about the difficult to detect homeless Veteran population. They could get help from Veterans Affairs. But memory of specific details of their service is often lacking.

## **Solutions:**

I would think that those otherwise able individuals with an true unexpected financial problem could be helped with a short-term, state government-backed loan. This is similar to what the US State Department does when an American citizen gets stranded in another country.

However, the only case in which a challenged "homeless" person should be transferred is where a relative, agency or institution is willing and able to accept responsibility for the individual. Like an "unaccompanied minor", if the guardian is not waiting at the airline gate, they should be returned on the next flight. or else:

**The Homeless Repatriation Reciprocity Act** (my recommendation).

Fair is fair. NIMBY either. I'm suggesting to my legislators that if an inordinate number of homeless from Hawaii (or any other non-reciprocity state) are found in Oklahoma they should be given the same deal. Buy them a new Hawaiian shirt and a one way ticket to Honolulu. And because we probably only know about 1/2 of them, for every one we find, we should send 2. All other states have to join in. Those who don't join early inherit America's homeless. "Homeless Airlines" would flourish. You know where this pyramid-like scheme is going.

**OR:** Our fine legislators from Hawaii and other states like Oklahoma could work together on a better solution. No, this is not easy. I would be interested in your comments and appreciate your service to our citizens.

**Jay R. Schrand**

Enid, Oklahoma  
[schrand@earthlink.net](mailto:schrand@earthlink.net)

CC: My legislators and homeless advocates

[capitol.hawaii.gov](http://capitol.hawaii.gov) [HB 1187](#): (author) Rep. Rida Cabanilla

Mark Niese / Associated Press

**Bill to repatriate homeless advances** - Supporters say it will save taxpayer money; critics call it heartless  
[Star Bulletin - Feb 5, 2009](#)

Herman DB, Susser ES, Struening EL, Link BL.

**Adverse childhood experiences: are they risk factors for adult homelessness?**

Am J Public Health. 1997 Feb;87(2):249-55. ([PubMed Ref](#))

Brown DW, Anda RF, Edwards VJ, Felitti VJ, Dube SR, Giles WH.

**Adverse childhood experiences and childhood autobiographical memory disturbance.**

Child Abuse Negl. 2007 Sep;31(9):961-9. ([PubMed Ref](#))

**(BLS) Bureau of Labor Statistics**

[Unemployment](#)

[Point-In-Time Count of the Homeless Survey Results 2007](#) for Oklahoma City (OKC)

[Help the Homeless 2008](#)

Dear Representative Cabanilla:

Please record my comments on HB 1187 which proposes, if signed into law, to provide homeless persons with air tickets to the US mainland herein as public record.

I take exception to your comments published in the *Honolulu Advertiser* in which you are quoted ..."reunite homeless with their families..." meaning homeless people from the mainland states who have come to Hawaii and are homeless here.

Who is to say they have families??!! You are making quite an assumption on your part by that statement. Many of these people, who have the right to free travel we enjoy in the United States of America, especially those over 40, do not have any family members still living. I do not. I am age 48. My mother and father died in 1979 and 2005 respectively. I am an only child. I think many others will be found to have a similar situation. They have no one on the mainland to go back to. So please do not make assumptions. I am aware many foreign cultures who have migrated to Hawaii come from places where huge extended families are common or the norm. In caucasian American culture this is not the norm these days with lower birth rates and smaller families.

Richard Spacer  
Kauai

## **WAIKIKI IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION**

Statement of

**Rick Egged**

**President, Waikiki Improvement Association**

Before the

**HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HOUSING**

Wednesday, February 4, 2009

8:30 AM

State Capitol, Conference Room 325

in consideration of

**HB 1187**

**RELATING TO THE HOMELESS**

Good morning Chair Cabanilla and Vice Chair Chong and members of the Committee: I am Rick Egged testifying on behalf of the Waikiki Improvement Association. WIA is a nonprofit organization representing 150 leading businesses and stakeholders in Waikiki. HB 1187 assists the homeless in reuniting their families. The Waikiki Improvement Association strongly supports this measure. The Waikiki business community has played an active supporting role in what is surely a community wide issue addressing the very human tragedy of homelessness.

We are not experts in this field but it is apparent that there are many different reasons a person becomes homeless, this bill would provide another important tool in the effort to provide solutions. It does not appear to be an attempt to merely export the problem but rather to assist individuals in rejoining their families and the support both psychologically

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Thank you for this opportunity to provide these comments.

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Hawaii House Committee on Housing

Chair Rida T.R. Cabanilla

Vice Chair Pono Chong

The Right Honorable

Members of the HSG Committee

Please permit me to submit this brief testimony in support of HB 1187  
Relating to Homeless.

It has 9 co-sponsors, including the Speaker Emeritus, Majority Whip, & 2 Assistant Majority Whips.

Recommend for consideration that the allocation amount be reduced from \$75,000 to \$50,000, since this is a difficult period to obtain funding for any program, let alone a new program.

The same goes for the effective date of July 1, 2009, since it's much too soon for the money committees to be able to ascertain the level or the start-up period, it should be postponed till effective June 1, 2010.

Other than the two reservations which I have stated, I feel that this much maligned piece of legislation, has merit, and the proviso safeguard a strictly voluntary program for the repatriation of our Homeless with the safeguards in place as individual support systems.

Hopefully, individuals & the major stakeholders will also provide their own take on this important legislation and the various non-profits and service organizations will step forward to put their own stamp on this proposal. This is a starting off-point.

Thank you again for this opportunity to present testimony in support of HB 1187 Relating to Homeless.

Submitted by a former Homeless (1952-1959).



**WAIKIKI HEALTH CENTER**  
REACHING OUT FROM THE HEART OF WAIKIKI.

**Testimony for:** COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY

**Hearing Room, Date and Time:** Conference Room 309, Wednesday, February 13, 2009, 2:20 PM

**Copies Needed:** 4

HB 1187 RELATING TO HOMELESS

Dear Chair Karamatsu and Vice Chair Ito and members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. I am Darlene W. Hein, Director of Community Services and I am writing in favor of HB 1187 to assist individuals and families who want to return to their families.

As the director of the Care-A-Van Program that provides medical care, behavioral health, and social service for individual and families who are experiencing homelessness on the island of Oahu, I believe a return to home program is needed. The Care-A-Van program is on of the largest outreach programs in the state we frequently receive requests for help to get home from newly arrived individuals and families who have ended up homeless on Oahu. We also get requests from families to assist their family member to get back home.

This program can work if it is run correctly, is voluntary and ensures that individuals and families assisted have a support system to return to. Please pass HB 1187 out of committee.

Mahalo,

Darlene W. Hein  
Director of Community Services  
Waikiki Health Center  
Submitted: February 2, 2009



HB 1187

Netra Halperin

Friday February 13, 2009

Good afternoon Chair Karamatsu and members of the committee.

I am in support of HB 1187.

As a social worker I am aware that many of the homeless, especially those in the downtown core, have come here recently from other states. They come with a fantasy of an island paradise, yet soon realize that Hawaii is just like any other place, requiring money for living expenses.

I believe we need to use as many creative solutions as possible to resolve the homeless crisis. So, for the individual or family that this bill is intended for, the homeless with family or another support network on the Mainland, this is an excellent solution.

And while this program does cost money, it will definitely more than pay for itself in savings on future homeless services.

Again, I think we should utilize whatever resourceful means possible to deal with the homeless crisis.

Mahalo for hearing my testimony today.