

THE SENATE
THE TWENTY-FIFTH LEGISLATURE
INTERIM OF 2009

COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland, Chair
Senator Les Ihara, Jr., Vice Chair

NOTICE OF INFORMATIONAL BRIEFING

DATE: Thursday, October 15, 2009
TIME: 12:15pm
PLACE: Conference Room 329
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

A G E N D A

The purpose of this informational briefing is review Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division, under the Department of Human Services. The focus will be on services for the blind under the Ho'opono program.

Vocational Rehabilitation is a State-Federal partnership program that provides services to help people with physical or mental impairments to attain successful employment outcomes.

The Ho'opono Program provides services to the blind. The program's goal is to enable visually impaired adults attain maximum vocational and functional independence with its team of skilled professionals providing varied services to meet the participant's individual needs.

Under the Randolph-Sheppard Vending Stand Act^[1] it is intended to "provide blind persons with remunerative employment, enlarge the economic opportunities of the blind, and stimulate the blind to greater efforts in striving to make themselves self-supporting."

The Ho'opono program is one of the most successful programs in the country, with graduates from the program securing approximately \$20 per hour in employment wages in Hawaii (according to advocates this is the highest rate in the country). However, Ho'opono participants and advocates for the blind have suggested that four positions under the program will be abolished and eight others eliminated via reduction in force. The abolished positions are as follows: One rehabilitation – communication skills teacher, one counselor position, one vocational rehabilitation specialist position and one employment specialist position. According to the advocates for the blind, the abolished positions are mostly funded with federal funds on a percentage basis. Finally, advocates for the blind and disabled have asserted that the visually impaired in Hawaii want to contribute to their community by being employed and being tax paying citizens thus helping Hawaii's economy. However, should these positions be eliminated, the services for the Ho'opono program will be severely affected and many believe this would lead to more visually impaired relying on state and federal assistance rather than being gainfully employed. A review of the significant impact as well as the adverse consequences, not only to the visually impaired, but also to the state, will be discussed.

Presenters will discuss the importance of the positions in question for Ho'opono and determine if such cost reducing measures are justified.

No public testimony will be accepted. [Testimony](#)

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For further information, please call the Committee Clerk at **586-6130**.

Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland
Chair