

**TESTIMONY ON DEAF SERVICE SECTION, DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL
REHABILITATION, DEPT. OF HUMAN SERVICES, STATE OF HAWAII**

SENATE AND HOUSE COMMITTEES ON HUMAN SERVICES

Friday, October 23, 2009 @ 2:00p.m. in Conference Room 329

Aloha, thank you very much Madame Chair Chun-Oakland & Mr. Chairman Mizuno for giving me the opportunity to testify before your respective Committees on Human Services. **My name is Art Frank and I'm the Chair of the Deaf Hard of Hearing Advisory Board, Div. of Vocational Rehabilitation, Dept of Human Services, State of Hawaii.** I'm from the Waianae Coast in West Oahu.

There have been some changes within the DSS at DVR since our last hearing with you on Friday, Sept 11th. Though we are happy that our DSS Supervisor (VRS V) will not be eliminated completely, we've had to compromise so she will hold a dual position as a supervisor for the DSS and another hearing section. We're not entirely happy but we can live with it for now as long as DVR understands once the economy improves we go back to our own DSS with our own DSS Supervisor. This is important to the deaf community because we fought long and hard going back to the 1980's to get where we are today, only to take a step backwards due to the budget crunch.

What I'm very concerned about today is DHS/the Lingle Administration's intention to request that this legislature abolish a counselor position (VRS IV) and a Social Service Assistant (SSA) from our DSS on Oahu. Our DVR Administrator Joe Cordova has been sounding like a broken record advising the DHHAB that they got to do this because of our \$2 billion dollar deficit. In a meeting on Oct 7th with our Director of the DHS, Ms. Lillian Koller she reiterated to our board members present the necessity for the administration to do this. I personally told Ms. Koller with Joe Cordova present that I hear them loud and clear and that I understand their position however, I hope that they can understand where we're coming from because it's unacceptable to our deaf community. On this one we have to agree to disagree because there's no way in hell will we be able to agree with the abolishment of these positions period. We've waited for years for these positions to be filled. First, they couldn't find any qualified person in Hawaii to fill the counselor's position, and they couldn't import anyone from the mainland

because of the money they were offering. After 9 years they finally froze the position and now they want to abolish it----no way, please don't let them do this.

I got another bone to pick with the administration that I hope this legislature can help us with. On Maui Roxanna Fujiyama who happens to be deaf and has a MS degree in Rehab Counseling is on the RIF list to be laid off in the first round on Nov 20th. As I stated in our DHHAB meeting on Sept 18th in Kapolei "to let someone go with the qualifications Ms. Fujiyama has is crazy, it's stupid because we've been looking for someone like her to fill our Oahu Rehab Counselor (VRS IV) position for many years and she fell into VR's lap on Maui because she married someone from Maui. Ms Fujiyama is the real deal that we need desperately because she is not only a trained Rehab Counselor she also lives in the world of deafness so she understands deaf culture, the deaf world and the deaf people. She can communicate with her clients from inside her as well as in fluent ASL. My God---- to let someone like that get away from us would be asinine as well as crazy. My friend Albert Perez of VR Oahu Branch said "Art you're speaking logic but with unions and seniority there's no logic". I understand what Albert was saying but I still think its' nuts to let this qualified person go.

I'm frustrated because I know damn well we can use Ms. Fujiyama to help the case load on Oahu by video phone. After all we have one young deaf Rehab Counselor with 1 ½ years of experience still attending the UH for her master's degree with a caseload of 244 clients. Fortunately the supervisor is presently providing direct services to 174 clients. She really shouldn't be doing that but what choice does she really have. Please remember under the new configuration the DSS supervisor will also supervise another section-----Metro I think. She will have to be some kind of a super lady to supervise two sections as well as provide direct services to 174 deaf/hard of hearing clients. Somebody in this government is trying to kid this deaf man, or they are nuts.

Can you, our government help us to save a very highly qualified Rehab Counselor for the Deaf? I don't know if you can. But I'm asking---no I'm begging you to please, please, please try and help us on this one. **Make some MAGIC for us.** We just cannot afford to lose Roxanna Fujiyama because our na keiki in the deaf community need her desperately. **PLEASE HELP US! Mahalo nui loa.**

ART FRANK, CHAIR, DHHAB

Francine Mae Lehuanaani Aona Kenyon

2520 Jasmine Street

Honolulu, HI 96816

TESTIMONY

ON

**DEAF SERVICES SECTION, DIVISION OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION,
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

Informational Hearing

with

Senate Committee on Human Services and House Committee on Human Services

Friday, October 23, 2009 at 2 p.m. in Conference Room 329

Aloha, Chair Suzanne Chun-Oakland, Vice-Chair Les Ihara, Chair John Mizuno, Vice-Chair Tom Brower, and Members of Senate and House Committees of Human Services.

My name is Francine Aona Kenyon and am an advocate for the rights of Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind individuals. I also serve as the vice-chair of Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing Advisory Board (DHHAB). Art Frank, the Chair of DHHAB, and DHHAB has received the concerns from the general population about the Deaf Services Section (D.S.S.) of Vocational Rehabilitation Division, Department of Human Services.

I firmly and strongly urge you to restore these important positions at Deaf Services Section that are affected as listed below:

VRS V Position #24471 (Ele's position)

VRS IV Position #31327 (vacant counselor position)

Social Service Assistant IV Position #118351(vacant)

Social Service Aid III Position #118352 (temporary half time)

These are the positions at D.S.S. affected and be restored because of three important reasons: (1) effective and efficient direct services; (2) qualified VR staff personnel serving (3) alarmingly increase of people with hearing loss statewide.

For over 20 years we have worked diligently to obtain services equal to individuals who are blind. It is VERY IMPORTANT for Department of Human Services to provide effective and efficient direct services to Deaf, hard-of-hearing, and deaf-blind people in the state because we have special communication needs that impact how services are provided to us.

The Deaf community has brought many concerns to the attention of DHHAB. We were informed that the Governor has the power to stop funding for positions, but only the Legislature has the power to abolish positions. We urge you to keep these positions to ensure adequate services are

provided to the Deaf community. We just learned that a qualified deaf person who has a Master's degree in counseling was rified and that we have two students who are deaf-blind now at deaf school and need the Vocational Rehabilitation services.

Therefore, I strongly and firmly urge you to restore positions now allocated to the DSS and encourage the State to hire more qualified deaf or hearing VR applicants skilled in American Sign Language to guarantee more future deaf and hard-of-hearing graduates with the job opportunities so they could come home and work in DSS or comprehensive Vocational Rehabilitation Center for the deaf.

Sincerely,

Francine Mae Aona Kenyon
Deaf Advocate



UNIVERSITY OF HAWAII SYSTEM

Legislative Testimony

Written Testimony Presented Before the Joint
House & Senate Committees on Human Services
October 23, 2009 @ 2:00 p.m.

by

John Morton

Vice President for Community Colleges, University of Hawai'i

Joint Informational Briefing for the Purpose of Reviewing Services for Individuals who are Deaf, Hard of Hearing, or Deaf-Blind Under the Department of Human Services

Chairs Mizuno, Chun Oakland, Vice Chairs Brower, Ihara, and Members of the Committees:

Mahalo for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

On behalf of Kapi'olani Community College (Kapi'olani) and the programs that serve the majority of deaf, hard of hearing and deaf-blind individuals from Hawai'i who attend college, we are in favor of restoring positions within the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)-Deaf Services Section (DSS). Kapi'olani has enjoyed a positive and long-standing relationship with DSS and our students have received phenomenal support from them. Diminishing the number of the service providers housed within DSS will diminish the number of services that unit provides. People will not be better served by these actions and the results could be disastrous. Therefore to avoid these consequences and continue the Section's success, it must be maintained with a *full*, qualified staff and supervisor. We believe it is imperative to ensure that all the deaf services' positions be reinstated and remain fully funded for the following reasons.

Communication and Expertise

Deaf and deaf-blind people have unique communication needs. The current DSS supervisor and staff recognize these needs and are able to successfully provide complete access to their services through direct communication. The DSS staffs are deaf and hard-of-hearing people who are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), understand the deaf culture and are members of the deaf community themselves. They are flexible communicators who are capable of matching the varied linguistic needs of their deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing clients. And, they are equally effective working with deaf clients and hearing employers.

Unlike other DVR units, the DSS supervisor maintains a full caseload and continuously provides direct services. There is no other supervisor in Hawai'i who is neither as highly qualified nor has served deaf, deaf-blind and hard-of-hearing clients for as many years

as she. It would be inappropriate and fiscally irresponsible to move a supervisor or staff members from other sections to DSS who are not fluent in ASL or experienced working with deaf clients. Such a move would necessitate regularly hiring professional ASL/English interpreters and that would be quite costly. Also, given the unabated shortage of qualified interpreters, clients may end up unserved because they will be unable to communicate with the DVR staff.

Client Success

The DSS supervisor and staff were selected because of their understanding of deaf community members and belief in their clients' potential, whether they are transitioning to college or preparing for work. Kapi'olani students and other DSS clients have thrived for these reasons. Unfortunately funding cuts are already affecting students, hindering their ability to be successful and putting their educational and career goals in jeopardy. An Order of Selection has been imposed resulting in the denial of students who are qualified to enter Gallaudet University or continue to attend Kapi'olani. Without full funding and the support of qualified DSS staff, the long-range effects may be people who are under-employed and possibly unemployable.

Given the above justifications, we appeal to your collective wisdom to restore the funding for these crucial positions within DVR's Deaf Services Section, maintain its viability and success serving people who are deaf, deaf-blind and hard of hearing.

Mahalo nui loa.

Jan L. Fried, Professor and Coordinator
American Sign Language/Interpreter Education Program
Kapi'olani Community College