

SB 893

Proposed SD 1

Measure Title: RELATING TO INFORMATION ACCESS.

Report Title: Telephone-based Audible Information Access Service; Public Utilities Commission; Appropriation

Description: Directs the public utilities commission to establish and maintain a telephone-based audible information access service to provide access to daily newspapers and other periodicals in an audio medium; amends the purpose of the universal service program to include information access; makes appropriation. (\$)

Companion:

Package: Deaf and Blind

Current Referral: CPN, WAM

NEIL ABERCROMBIE
GOVERNOR



PATRICIA MCMANAMAN
INTERIM DIRECTOR

PANKAJ BHANOT
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 17, 2011

MEMORANDUM:

TO: The Honorable Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

FROM: Patricia McManaman, Interim Director

SUBJECT: **S.B. 893, Proposed S.D. 1 - RELATING TO INFORMATION
ACCESS**

Hearing: Thursday, February 17, 2011, 8:30 a.m.
Conference Room 229, State Capitol

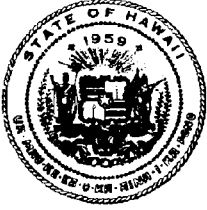
PURPOSE: The purpose of this bill is to direct the Disability and Communication Access Board to establish and maintain a telephone-based audible information access service to provide access to daily newspapers and other periodicals in an audio medium; makes appropriations from the Wireless Enhanced 911 Fund to the Disability and Communication Access Board Special Fund to establish the information access service.

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports the intent of this bill. We defer to the Wireless Enhanced 911 Board and the Department of Accounting and General Services on the fiscal implications of this bill.

Telephone-based audible information access is an important service for many individuals to provide time-sensitive information such as a local daily newspaper.

Expanded access for our print-disabled clients is essential through the Newslines service for job listings, local and national media information, postings of our public hearings that solicit commentary on our State Plans and many other important information supportive of our clients to enable them to support themselves through employment and lead quality lives.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony to this Committee.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

919 Ala Moana Boulevard, Room 101 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96814
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V/TDD) • Fax (808) 586-8129

February 17, 2011

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE AND CONSUMER PROTECTION

Senate Bill 893 – Relating to Information Access

Senate Bill 893 establishes a mechanism to provide funding for a telephone-based audible information access service, otherwise known as “Newsline” to provide access to daily newspapers in an audio medium for persons who are blind and visually impaired.

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports the Newsline service in general. Senate Draft 1 proposes significant changes to the funding mechanism.

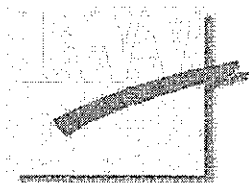
DCAB is designated as the lead agency. While we are certainly willing to administer the program, we believe that the Department of Human Services, Vocational Rehabilitation and Services for the Blind Division may be the more appropriate agency and urge continued dialogue as the bill moves to the next Committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Fischlowitz-Leong
BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG
Chairperson
Legislative Committee

Francine Wai
FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF HAWAII

TESTIMONY ON SB 893 RELATING TO INFORMATION ACCESS

Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection
Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair
Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Vice Chair
Date: of Hearing: Thursday, February 17, 2011
Time: 8:30 A.M.
Place: Conference Room 229

Testimony sent in by: Jean Aoki, LWV Legislative Committee

Chair Baker, Vice Chair Taniguchi, members of CPN,

The League of Women Voters of Hawaii strongly supports SB 893 which would make the contents of newspapers and other periodicals accessible to those with visual impairments and other impairments which make reading difficult or impossible.

The other means of bringing written material to the impaired that exist cannot act with the speed that telephone-based access can. With the technology available to bring time-sensitive print information to the thousands who are left without access to almost instant news in an age when events, local, national, and foreign are calling attention to changing societies, proposed policy changes, public demands and demonstrations, etc., we cannot deny them this opportunity to keep up with the rest of us. Television with its captions can only give them limited information. For in-depth coverage, access to other media is necessary.

If the funding suggested is at all available, let's enable the people now without access to the printed pages of newspapers and periodicals to enjoy that which the rest of us take so much for granted.

We urge serious consideration of SB 893.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 893.

Senate Bill 893, SD#1



Commerce and Consumer Protection (CPN)

District 5

Hawaii State Capitol, Room 230

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Thursday, February 17, 2011

Re: Support for SB893, SD#1 Relating to information access.

Dear Senator Baker and members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection, my name is Milton Ota, and I am the Sponsor Agent of the NFB-Newsline® program for the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I have been using the service since 2000 and find that over the years the service has grown. I receive the Star-Advertiser, the Wall Street Journal, Diabetes Self Management and PCWorld on a regular basis via e-mail. I also on occasion check the television schedule to see what is coming up on TV.

- Reading the Star-Advertiser give me access to full stories of headlines that you hear on TV and radio
- Reading diabetes Self Management helps me to keep up with the latest information on how to better manage my diabetes
- The Wall Street Journal keeps me up to date with technology news and world events
- PCWorld allows me to read more detailed information on technology trends

The full benefit of using the NFB-Newsline® service means that I don't have to go to the different publication websites and have to deal with advertisements, pop-ups and a very busy and cluttered website just to read what I want.

At times I will also go to the NFB-Newsline® secure website and find an article from a previous issue of one of the publications that I have read to reread it or get it sent back to me via e-mail.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,
Milton Ota
NFB-NEwsline® Sponsor Agent
National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Dear Chair Baker, Vice Chair Taniguchi, and the members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection,

I am in favor of SB893 SD1.

I use a system to have timely information from local and national newspapers, local agencies and organizations, national magazines, TV listings, and job listings read to me over the phone. It's helpful because I can call a direct or toll-free number any time of the day to access this material, skip or repeat articles or sections, and so on.

Before Newsline, I had to wait for someone to read the print information to me, or I scanned it into my computer, which was time-consuming and not always accurate. However, since the publishers upload the files to the system, I get accurate information in a timely manner--usually around the time the newspapers or magazines go to press.

It's important that this service be free to the individual subscribers, including a toll-free number, because of the 70% unemployment rate among the blind. Also, although many newspapers now offer some of their articles online for free, accessing the full papers over the phone is more affordable (especially with services like Lifeline) and more portable.

However, with on-demand access to news articles and job listings, print-disabled people can stay current and find employment. (In HI, those of us who are employed earn an average of about \$20 / hour...)

On the other hand, there's a direct number for those of us who have free long-distance, and those of us with internet access can also cut down on toll costs to the system by accessing the material on a password-protected website or download it in a specialized format to read on portable devices only available to the print-disabled.

Finally, this system is available to all print-disabled Americans (not just the blind, but also people with dyslexia, certain physical disabilities, elderly people who've lost enough sight to become legally blind, etc), but each state pays for their own citizens' access. We hope to have a stable source of funds because it's been difficult to fund Newsline from various private and government sources in HI, but if we can't find enough funding, we'll have to "go dark" until we have enough again for HI's subscriptions.

I personally experienced this. I signed up for Newsline when it first came online (in 1999 or 2000) while attending the Louisiana Center for the Blind. However, when we moved so my husband could pursue his PhD, we learned that Arkansas didn't have Newsline. I was relieved when we moved to CA, which had Newsline, and again when we moved back home around the time Newsline came online in HI in 2005. Having had to do without, I know how others will feel if we can't fund this essential service.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ronalene White - Kahalu'u, HI
VP, Anuenue Chapter
National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i

Testimony for CPN 2/17/2011 8:30:00 AM SB893

Conference room: 229

Testifier position: comments only

Testifier will be present: Yes

Submitted by: Ann Lemke

Organization: National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Address:

Phone:

E-mail: lemke@hawaii.edu

Submitted on: 2/16/2011

Comments:

I support this legislation that can continue to make newspapers, job listings, and other print media available to us on a timely basis, as our society expects all of us to be literate and well informed.

Brandon Young

Newsline Testimony

Dear Sen. Baker and Others,

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 893 Senate Draft 1 that regards to changing the language to support full funding of the Newsline service. The Newsline service is a database that holds hundreds of newspapers and allows those who are registered to access them via their telephone or the internet. Currently, there is a surplus that is collected via the Public Utilities Commission (PUC) for deaf relay services. We would like to use some of these surplus funds to pay for the Newsline service. In 2005, there was a contract with the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii and the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind Division to pay for the Newsline service. However, because of some vital cuts to the V.R. program, their contract has not been renewed. We are now seeking a permanent funding source so that there is no possibility of losing the Newsline service. Anyone who has a print disability is eligible for this service. I want you to know that I am a user of this service and I use it to access our local newspaper on a daily basis. I would hope that you and your colleagues would consider this measure for hearing. Thank you and have a wonderful day.

Aloha

Brandon Young

NFB of Honolulu Secretary

SB893 SD1

Hearing February 17, 2011 8:30 a.m. room 229 Capitol



Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Vice Chair
Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection (CPN)

February 16, 2011

Re: Strong Support for SB893-SD1, Relating to information access.

Dear Senator Baker and members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection,

My name is Katie Stinnett, and I am a user of Newsline, because I cannot read print due to my disability. The importance of hearing and passing this bill can make the difference in the lives of print disabled individuals and our ability to participate fully in our communities of Hawai'i.

I have used Newsline services since 1998 and access the following publications to get information about current events: The New Yorker, Atlantic Monthly, Diabetic Action Network, Honolulu Advertiser and now StarAdvertiser, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and the San Francisco News papers.

If Newsline is not funded, I will not have access to the information I need to be aware of what is happening in the local community or at a national level, which in turn disables me from participating actively in my community efforts in both career and volunteer organizations, as a vital tax paying voting citizen.

As well additional features that continue to prove invaluable to me are; job listings, bulletin board postings of public hearings, PSA's and other events specific to print disabled individuals, TV guide listings and national postings that will affect my life as an individual with a disability.

The Newsline service enables me daily to keep abreast with my colleagues in my work place. This is vital to my career as I work in the field of employment for individuals with disabilities. Access to current market trends, local and national events that affect our employment rate, job listings, election and campaign information many times only found in our newspapers, often makes the difference both in my personal and working life to participate.

To enable all members of the community to be aware of what is happening in the community and to have informed voters, it is important to have access to publications that are available through Newsline. I encourage you to hear and pass the bill out of committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Sincerely,

Katie Stinnett

Honorable Members of the Commerce and Consumer Protection Committee:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 893 SD1. I have been a NFB Newslite subscriber for about 10 years. It's been of great benefit to me to be able to readily and easily read the local newspaper as well as other national publications when I have the time and inclination to do so.

One really special situation comes to mind. Last year when our Rainbows Softball team got to go to the World Series, what could be more exciting! Yes, I could follow the games on the radio and/or TV but I discovered something really special that occurred daily during that time in the newspaper. The catcher, Katie Grimes, sent in articles about her experience along with the other women that was very personal and gave a perspective of the whole experience you'd never have if you couldn't read her articles. You can bet that everyday I had to get on the phone and check the paper to get her latest updates and I looked forward to each and every one.

On a day to day basis, NFB Newslite gives me access not only to the local paper, but to newspapers all across the nation. If I'm traveling, I can check the local paper at my destination, I can read the news in the areas where my family lives, etc. But, with NFB Newslite I also have access to extensive job listings if and when I need to find a job; I can read many national magazines in various different interest areas and I can even check to see what's on TV so that I can pick and choose my programs and not miss my favorites. NFB Newslite also has a local channel where news that is pertinent to blind people in Hawaii can be posted and easily accessed and local agencies can put up their newsletters and special announcements as well.

Please support NFB Newslite as it is a great and vital resource to people with print disabilities in Hawaii.

Respectfully,
Charlene Ota

SB893-SD1

Hearing Thursday February 17, 2011 Room 229 Capitol
Senate Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection

Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Chair
Senator Brian T. Taniguchi, Vice Chair

February 16, 2011

Dear Senator Baker and members of the Committee on Commerce and Consumer Protection,

My name is Finia Kachita, and I am a user of Newsline, because I cannot read print due to my disability. I strongly support SB893-SD1 for the following reasons.

I use Newsline services to access my local paper, the Star-Advertiser and other current events, including Job listings in Hawaii or on the Mainland. If Newsline is not funded, I will not have access to the information I need to be aware of what is happening in Hawaii or nationally.

You might say, "have someone read the publications to me". I could do that, but is it really necessary to put such a burden on someone, let alone myself especially if I have to look for someone to read me the Papers?.

Let alone that it may be long after the time the paper and information was originally published?

If Newsline is no more, it would be like taking away my rights from me. How can we the disabled community be a part of society if we are limited to the necessary tools we need so we can live a normal life. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully yours,

Finia Kachita.

Testimony for CPN 2/17/2011 8:30:00 AM SB893

Conference room: 229

Testifier position:

Testifier will be present: No

Submitted by: Elizabeth Whitney

Organization: Individual

Address:

Phone:

E-mail: brailleit@hawaii.rr.com

Submitted on: 2/16/2011

Comments:

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important bill.