



CATHOLIC CHARITIES HAWAII

TO: Representative Ken Ito, Chair
Representative James Kunane Tokioka, Vice Chair
Committee on Veterans, Military & International Affairs, & Culture and the Arts

FROM: Diane M. Terada, Division Administrator

DATE: Monday, March 21, 2016 (9:00 a.m., Room 312)

RE: **IN SUPPORT of HR 35, Urging United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to Immediately Resume Biometric Intake and Interviews on the Counties of Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai**

Catholic Charities Hawai'i (CCH) strongly supports HR 35, Urging United States Citizenship and Immigration Services to Immediately Resume Biometric Intake and Interviews on the Counties of Hawaii, Maui, and Kauai.

CCH is a Board of Immigration Appeals (BIA) recognized agency and has the only three BIA partially accredited staff in the State of Hawai'i, including one accredited staff on the island of Hawai'i. This accreditation allows our non-attorney staff to represent immigrants on legal immigration matters with the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS), such as Application for Naturalization, Petition for Alien Relative, Deferred Action for Childhood Action, or Change of Status to Permanent Resident.

Our work targets low-income immigrants. One of the barriers to maintaining legal status is cost. In addition to paying for USCIS filing fees, which generally cost several hundred dollars, our neighbor island immigrant clients must pay to travel to Oahu, including air and ground transportation, to complete biometric intake and interviews. This is often a significant barrier that results in immigrants falling out of legal status, or unable to achieve their goal of becoming U.S. citizens.

We support this resolution in order to provide immigrants, who live on the neighbor islands, reasonable access to USCIS-required steps that are necessary to maintain legal status or achieve U.S. citizenship.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of HR 35.





Testimony in SUPPORT of H.R. 35 Presented Before the
House Committee on Veterans, Military, & International Affairs, & Culture and the Arts
March 21, 2016 at 9:00 a.m. in Rm. 312

by
Khara Jabola-Carolus, Director
Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights

Dear Chair Ito, Vice Chair Tokioka, and Members of the Committees,

On behalf of the Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights, the immigration arm of Faith Action for Community Equity (FACE), I would like to thank the Committee for this opportunity to testify. The Coalition **strongly supports** H.R. 35, which urges U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to restore equal access to the immigration process for all Hawai'i residents.

In 2007, USCIS discontinued its mobile operations to Hawai'i Island, Kaua'i, and Maui. The lack of basic immigration services outside of Honolulu has a pervasive discriminatory effect on people attempting to access benefits that the agency is adjudicating. Residents are required to travel to Honolulu from their neighbor island homes, at their own expense, in order to undergo USCIS fingerprinting and interviews required to obtain or maintain lawful immigration status. The ability to lawfully work, study, and reside in the United States or secure the highest privilege of our nation's immigration system— citizenship— is essential for access to vital medical services, job security, and political participation.

HCIR is the only organization in the state that coordinates policy advocacy to advance immigrant rights. We serve as a partnership platform for over one hundred direct service providers, immigration attorneys, faith leaders, professors, and individual advocates. Through our community work, we have witnessed the discriminatory impact USCIS operating against the reality that our state is a set of islands. USCIS has an obligation to provide a feasible process otherwise its services are meaningless.

Below are recent case stories that demonstrate the severe hardship placed on our residents as a result of USCIS current policy:

Kaua'i

Testimony and Anonymized Case Stories from Debra de Luís, M.A., Community Director, Kaua‘i Catholic Charities (January 2015)

- “From a service providers perspective, about the need for immigration services in Kaua‘i County, we regularly hear from people for whom it is a severe hardship to travel to Honolulu for necessary USCIS services. Resumption of basic [USCIS] services in Kaua‘i County would be very beneficial for low-income individuals and families;”
- A legal resident, 60 years old, who relocated [to Kaua‘i] from outside the US (I believe from the Middle East) approximately 6 years ago first came to our office when his elderly family member (with whom he came to the US) died. With only one income, this soft-spoken man requested assistance with a bus pass to get to/from part-time work as a kitchen helper at a resort. He eventually saved money for a bicycle and still rides approximately 6 miles each way to work (his hours vary and are sometimes outside the times of the bus schedule). His income averaged approximately \$650 a month and he pays \$500 for a rented room. He came to us a few months ago because he received some immigration paperwork that required he go to Honolulu for an appointment. Distraught because he faced the choice of paying for airfare or paying his rent, he stated he had been trying to save money, but found it challenging to cover food, clothing, medication co-pays, and daily living expenses;
- We periodically are in contact with a former VISTA (Volunteers In Service To America) who came to Hawai‘i on a VISTA assignment. He was born in Mexico and had used an agency he found advertised online to process what he thought was necessary paperwork for citizenship. After connecting him with a CCH representative in Hilo, he discovered he had much more to accomplish than he initially thought he did and since he works part-time for a company providing tours to visitors, he barely has enough to cover living expenses. When he heard he needed to go to Honolulu for assistance, he pointed out he barely earns enough to survive and that a trip to the moon would be as affordable;
- A familiar face in our community is another elder who came to Kaua‘i from Mexico to work in a restaurant owned by family. When they had a falling-out he lost his income and housing. He has been quite ingenious in finding ways to earn money, but the last time he tried to get to Honolulu to resolve issues relating to his immigration status, he had to use his rent money so came to us for assistance with rent. I hear he is currently houseless;

Hawai‘i Island

Testimony and Anonymized Case Stories from Linda Spencer, Program Coordinator, Catholic Charities (November 2015)

- Woman needed alien card renewed. It had been expired for several years because she could not afford the filing fee, she works for a fast food restaurant earning slightly above minimum wage. She’s married with two children, one pre teen and one teen. Her husband has been on permanent disability for ten years and receiving dialysis three times a week. She had been a permanent resident long enough to apply for citizenship. Advised her of the filing fees (\$595 +

\$85 biometrics) and the number of trips it would take to go to Honolulu to complete the process; (1) for fingerprinting, (2) Interview, (3) and possibly the swearing in if it could not be done after the interview. Able to apply for a fee waiver for filing but they had to borrow money from family to make the trips to Honolulu;

- Elderly man on fixed income. Making just enough money from a small pension and social security to pay his monthly expenses. Needed to renew his alien card (\$365 filing and \$85 biometrics). He had saved enough for the filing but said it would be a struggle to pay for the trip to Honolulu for biometrics;
- Family of four, parents and two children. Below poverty level but not on assistance. The family wanted to apply for citizenship so they could all be sworn in at the same time. Had to wait three years before they could save enough money to file and pay for a minimum of two trips to Honolulu for the fingerprinting, testing and swearing in;
- A few years ago before the start of “biometrics” the process of ink and card was being used. One man made three trips to Honolulu to renew his green card because the first two times they were unable to use the prints;
- One permanently disabled woman who was being cared for by her sister was unable to complete the process of becoming a U.S. Citizen before she died. Family was working with their medical care givers and submitting papers to have fingerprinting and testing done on our Island because she could not travel. It took so long for the approval that it did not come until after her death.

Maui

Testimony and Anonymized Case Stories from Rev. Tasha Kama, Organizer, Faith Action for Community Equity (February and March 2016)

- “The application for Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals is a big expense when it’s three of us trying to get the application, plus paying the lawyer, food, transportation, and paying for airline tickets that have to be round trip to get the biometrics done on a different island. It would be a lower expense and better for people around the island of Maui to get a biometrics center to cut out this big inconvenient expense;” (2/20/16)
- “A service that spare us the expenses to travel to the island of O‘ahu would be fabulous because the last time I went to take my [USCIS] fingerprints I had problems with my work. In my case, I had to call in ill to miss work. The days that I requested were not given to me because I work at a restaurant that is very busy. I spent about \$650 with airfare and transportation, parking, taxi, food and, as if that wasn’t enough, my plane was delayed until 7:20 p.m. I waited approximately four hours to return to Maui. It would be great if this procedure could be here on Maui;” (2/20/16)

- “It would be great if immigration officer gave a service in which we could do our biometrics on Maui, because life is not easy. I had to miss a day of work, pay flight to Honolulu, and my wife had to make changes to her workday— taking the kids to school and picking them up, and taking me to the airport and picking me up. I appreciate your help;” (2/14/16)
- “My request in this letter is to ask a favor to [USCIS]: to put an immigration office here on the island of Maui, as it is almost impossible for me to travel to the island of O‘ahu. I have three children and I have to find a nanny, pay for the trip, and pay the travel costs. I lose my work day, which hurts me a lot because I need the money, and in my [immigration case] I need [USCIS] service in Maui as soon as possible because I am submitting my papers. I need your help to save time, money, work, transportation, and to have time for my kids;” (2/14/16)
- I would really appreciate it if you help us bring this service to the people who are doing their best to apply and to oblige by rules and regulations in immigration. They are requesting your help to save time, money, and have time with their kids. They worry of unprecedented problems where they have to immediately attend to their kids and cannot do so when they are on Honolulu. In addition, they have to deal with the cost of transportation, food, and cancelled plans.” (3/2/16)

As evidenced by these first-hand accounts, the need for USCIS to resume basic services to our islands is urgent. We need a fair and functioning immigration system. This is our enduring vision. Accordingly, we ask that you favorably consider this important resolution. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 35.

Sincerely,

Khara Jabola-Carolus

tokioka2 - Karina

From: amy agbayani <amy_agbayani@yahoo.com>
Sent: Sunday, March 20, 2016 3:00 PM
To: vmitestimony
Subject: SUPPORT FOR HR 35, March 21, 9am from Hawai'i Friends of Civil Rights



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF HR 35

**URGING UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES TO IMMEDIATELY
RESUME BIOMETRIC INTAKE AND INTERVIEWS ON THE COUNTIES OF HAWAII, MAUI, AND
KAUAI**

SUBMITTED BY:
AMY AGBAYANI, CO-CHAIR HAWAII FRIENDS OF CIVIL RIGHTS
3432 B-1 Kalihi St., Honolulu, Hi 96819

House Committee on Veterans, Military Affairs, International Affairs & Culture and the Arts
Monday, March 21, 2016, 9 a.m., Conference Room 312

Dear Chair Ito, Vice-Chair Tokioka and Members of the Committee:

The Hawaii Friends of Civil Rights strongly SUPPORTS HR 35, which urges U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to return mobile fingerprinting and interviews to Hawai'i Island, Maui, and Kaua'i on a quarterly basis. HFCR supports programs and policies that promote social justice, non-discrimination and equal access. We believe that the current practices do not provide equal access to basic government services. The many barriers facing individuals and families who reside outside of O'ahu needing these services are well described in the resolution. HFCR respectfully request you approve HR 35.

tokioka2 - Karina

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Monday, March 21, 2016 2:06 AM
To: vmitestimony
Cc: annsfreed@gmail.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for HR35 on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM

HR35

Submitted on: 3/21/2016

Testimony for VMI on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Ann S Freed	Hawaii Women's Coalition	Support	No

Comments: The Hawaii Women's Coalition is in support of this measure.

Please note that testimony submitted less than 24 hours prior to the hearing, improperly identified, or directed to the incorrect office, may not be posted online or distributed to the committee prior to the convening of the public hearing.

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tokioka2 - Karina

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Saturday, March 19, 2016 4:47 PM
To: vmitestimony
Cc: catherine.a.betts@hawaii.gov
Subject: *Submitted testimony for HR35 on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM*

HR35

Submitted on: 3/19/2016

Testimony for VMI on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Catherine Betts	Hawaii State Commission on the Status of Women	Support	No

Comments:

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tokioka2 - Karina

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Saturday, March 19, 2016 8:15 PM
To: vmitestimony
Cc: dreamingriver@gmail.com
Subject: Submitted testimony for HR35 on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM

HR35

Submitted on: 3/19/2016

Testimony for VMI on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Catherine Ishida	Individual	Support	No

Comments: The need to travel to Honolulu is a de facto denial of these services for people living on the neighbor islands.

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tokioka2 - Karina

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Saturday, March 19, 2016 3:03 PM
To: vmitestimony
Cc: joyamarshall0416@gmail.com
Subject: *Submitted testimony for HR35 on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM*

HR35

Submitted on: 3/19/2016

Testimony for VMI on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Joy Marshall	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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LATE

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS, MILITARY, & INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS,
& CULTURE AND THE ARTS

Dear Chair Ito, Vice-Chair Tokioka and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for hearing HR 35 urging the U. S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to resume providing biometric services to Hawai'i, Maui, and Kaua'i Counties on a quarterly basis. As an active advocate for immigrant rights and immigration reform for the past eight (8) years I am keenly aware of the unfair hardship our federal government has placed on Hawaii's neighbor island residents.

In 2009, USCIS completely discontinued basic immigration services to the neighbor islands citing budgetary constraints. Immigrant residents must now travel to Honolulu to undergo basic biometric intake and interviews required for most immigration processes. This requirement places an undue disadvantage and expense on tax-paying residents who are already helping bear the cost through the required fees and federal taxes they pay. Adding the additional cost of expensive airfare is discriminatory. Some of my neighbor island colleagues have used their personal funds in order to accompany their clients to Honolulu because they are unable to travel alone.

The requirement to travel to Honolulu is sheer discrimination against legally present residents who are trying to upgrade their immigrant status on the pathway to citizenship. Please **pass HR35** and continue to uphold Hawaii's position as a leader in the struggle to achieve civil rights for all.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony in support of House Resolution 35.

Faithfully yours,

Rev. Stanley Bain

LATE

HR 35

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.R. 18

**URGING UNITED STATES CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION SERVICES TO
IMMEDIATELY RESUME BIOMETRIC INTAKE AND INTERVIEWS ON THE COUNTIES
OF HAWAII, MAUI, AND KAUAI**

Senate Committee on Public Safety, Intergovernmental, and Military Affairs
Tuesday, March 22, 2016, 1:20 p.m., Conference Room 229

Dear Chair Nishihara Vice-Chair Espero, and Members of the Committee:

As a resident of Kaua'i, I would like to thank the Committee for hearing this resolution and for the opportunity to testify in SUPPORT of S.R. 18, which urges U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) to return mobile fingerprinting and interviews to Kaua'i, as well as to other neighbor islands, on a quarterly basis.

USCIS must provide a meaningful immigration process to all Hawai'i residents and adapt its operations to the reality that our state is a set of islands. In 2009, USCIS completely discontinued basic immigration services to the neighbor islands citing budgetary constraints. Immigrant residents must now travel to Honolulu to undergo basic biometric intake and interviews required for most immigration processes. This failure poses a serious, practical challenge for many immigrants, and represents a systemic access to justice issue. In the light of security requirements and the fact that only one airline company provides travel service between islands, time and cost have become considerable obstacles to anyone wishing to obtain American citizenship in our state.

Accordingly, I SUPPORT S.R. 18. I respectfully request that your Committee PASS the measure. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Sincerely,

Gilmore R. Guirao
P. O. Box 677
Kekaha, HI 96752

tokioka2 - Karina

From: mailinglist@capitol.hawaii.gov
Sent: Sunday, March 20, 2016 7:29 PM
To: vmitestimony
Cc: wctanaka@gmail.com
Subject: *Submitted testimony for HR35 on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM*

HR35

Submitted on: 3/20/2016

Testimony for VMI on Mar 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 312

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Wayne Tanaka	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

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