



Comments in SUPPORT of S.R. 18 Presented Before the  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Thursday, April 19, 2016, 9:00.m., Conference Room 211  
by

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Hawai'i Coalition for Immigrant Rights of Faith Action for Community Equity

**Dear Chair Tokuda, Vice Chair Dela Cruz, 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 submit comments in support of S.R. 18. The Coalition **strongly supports** S.R. 18, 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 submit our thoughts in support of S.R. 18.

Sincerely,

Khara Jabola-Carolus

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**Subject:** \*Submitted testimony for SR18 on Apr 21, 2016 09:00AM\*  
**Date:** Tuesday, April 19, 2016 4:33:52 PM

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**SR18**

Submitted on: 4/19/2016

Testimony for WAM on Apr 21, 2016 09:00AM in Conference Room 211

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Javier Mendez-Alvarez	Individual	Oppose	No

Comments:

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