



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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

February 3, 2017

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

House Bill 646 – Relating to Parking for Disabled Persons

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) opposes House Bill 646 which would expand the eligibility to obtain a parking placard to persons who are blind or visually impaired. The purpose of this bill is to allow individuals who are blind or visually impaired to apply for and obtain a removable windshield placard to use parking spaces reserved for persons with disabilities.

Congress enacted Public Law 100-641 with the intent to provide the opportunity to park in reserved spaces for persons with disabilities who are limited in their physical mobility or limited in their ability to walk a long distance. When the Federal Highway Administration and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration issued implementing regulations, they specifically excluded blindness as a qualifying condition. They relied on the National Federation of the Blind's Resolution 85-22, which states that "blindness, in and of itself, is not a mobility impairment and that the problems blind people face with respect to mobility cannot be remedied by making a handicapped parking space available to them."

Reserved parking spaces are necessary to ensure access for those with a mobility disability to places where the public is invited. Reserved parking spaces have two important features, (1) they are located on the shortest route to an accessible facility entrance, and (2) they have an adjacent access aisle. Access aisles, whether 5 or 8 feet wide, provide additional area for permittees with mobility aids, such as walkers, crutches, wheelchairs, and motorized scooters to fully open a car door or deploy a side-mounted lift. If reserved spaces are not available, disabled persons who need one or both features will be denied access to a facility. By contrast, people who are blind or visually impaired can use any parking space.

Currently in the State of Hawaii, there are over 108,000 disabled parking permits in use. Per the 2015 American Communities Survey, 21,952 Hawaii residents have a vision impairment. Passage of this bill will significantly increase the number of permits in use and thereby severely limit the availability of reserved parking spaces for people who need to park closer to an accessible facility entrance, the use of an access aisle, or both. In addition this bill would require an appropriation of approximately \$264,000 to cover the cost of issuing the additional placards, assuming that all the individuals come forth to ask for a placard.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Respectfully submitted,

BARBARA FISCHLOWITZ-LEONG
Chairperson
Legislative Committee

FRANCINE WAI
Executive Director

February 1, 2017

From: Jeanne torres, Executive Director, Guide Dogs of Hawaii
To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:
Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair
Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair
Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member
Rep. Ken Ito, Member
Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member
Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member
Rep. Gene Ward, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646
Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017
Time: 9:00am
Conference Room 329

Dear Committee Chair Ohno and members:

I acknowledge that the current law entitles individuals with mobility difficulties to have access to a parking stall immediately outside of any place of business that serves the general public. Although Blind and Visually impaired individuals do not have physical difficulties in mobility, these individuals do have serious mobility limitations may walk into harm's way if appropriate accommodations are not in place.

90% of what we do and learn every day requires our sight. This includes walking. As parents, we always protect our young saying "Pay attention, when you are walking", "watch where you are going", or "look where you are going". This is not possible for the blind for obvious reasons. Here are a number of reasons why the blind and visually impaired residents may potentially benefit from the use of parking placards:

1. Blind and visually impaired people must be purposefully and systematically taught to navigate from one point to the next. Some might suggest that if the blind can get from the bus stop to the business door, they can get from the private vehicle to the door. It is important to remember that the bus stop and the entrance door are permanent landmarks. They don't move. The blind and visually impaired person is taught to navigate from the bus stop to the entrance door. Travelling by vehicle, on the other hand, is different. The vehicle is not parked in any exact stall. As such each experience is unfamiliar to the blind and visually impaired.
2. By having parked in a designated stall close to the entrance door, the blind and visually impaired will be able to independently and safely access the vehicle.
3. Blind and visually impaired persons rely on their sense of hearing and smell to compensate for their vision loss. We have older blind and visually impaired who must cope with loss of hearing as well. The loss of two senses is frustrating which often leads to stress and fear when trying to navigate in a noisy environment.
4. There is the matter of silent vehicles that the sighted person can see but not hear. Consider a blind person navigating through a parking lot, only to come upon a silent car.
5. Blind and visually impaired persons experience extreme hardship coping with the different sounds and movement around them as they navigate. Allowing the blind and visually impaired to obtain parking placards will promote safe travelling.

By passing Bill HB646, you will be lifting away one of many challenges that the blind and visually impaired person must cope with on a daily basis.

I am in full support of HB646 and request that the committee offer the blind community the opportunity to travel safely and confidently by passing this very practical and sensible measure.

February 2, 2017

From: Tehani Tau, Case manager specialist, Guide Dogs of Hawaii

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:

Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair

Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair

Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member

Rep. Ken Ito, Member

Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member

Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member

Rep. Gene Ward, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

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My name is Tehani Tau and I am in total support of HB 646. Although I am not blind, I support HB 646 because I have been involved with the blind community from a young age. More recently I have gotten completely involved, working with both youth and seniors who are blind and visually impaired. In my experience there are many safety issues that people who are sighted don't realize the blind and visually impaired are forced to face every day.

Individuals who are blind are limited to what they can perceive in their surroundings. Due to their lack of sight, they rely on their hearing, sense of smell, and other people to navigate when traveling. These methods are not fool proof and are not always reliable. Allowing someone with a visual impairment to have a handicap placard would reduce many of the safety hazards that they face when having to go out. Some may question why a person who is blind and not able to drive would need a handicap placard, but like many other people with disabilities they often have a friend or family member take them around to run errands.

Due to the fact they are not allocated handicap placards the blind individual will often be dropped off in the front of their destination unattended while waiting, or forced to travel long distances in busy parking lots. These may not be recognized as obvious safety hazards, but indeed they are within the blind community. When you are left alone in an unfamiliar environment that you cannot see, you are subject to being taken advantage of. Homeless people will ask for money in hopes of them accidentally giving a bigger bill than intended, or even go as far as to try and rob the blind individual because they are alone. When walking through busy parking lots visually impaired people rely solely on the people around them to be attentive when driving. Unfortunately with the increasing amount of distracted drivers on the road this is extremely dangerous. For children whom are blind who are only beginning to learn how to use a cane for travel the dangers are even greater. The kids are still learning the skills they need to use their other sense to be aware of their surroundings. Parents of blind students who may also have young children with them would make what should be a simple task like going to a store less worrisome because traveling across a long parking lot is no longer an issue.

All in all, I am in support of HB 646 because I strongly feel that we should offer support to the disabled in any way that we can. This directly benefits the portion of the disabled community that has been left out for far too long. Mahalo for your consideration on HB 646.

February 2, 2017

From: Aza Torres
Case Management Specialist for the Blind and Visually Impaired
Guide Dogs of Hawaii

To: Committee on Human Services:
Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair
Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair
Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member
Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member
Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member
Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member
Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

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As an active advocate for the Blind and Visually Impaired, I am fully in favor of HB 646.

Although I am sighted, my mother has been legally blind since my birth. I have been her primary sighted guide since I was able to effectively distinguish hazards that she could not, and I am also a Case Manager for blind and visually impaired individuals of all ages. I hope to shed light on the mobility limitations that create obstacles that are frightening and potentially harmful for the blind community.

Safety is the key reason behind my support for this bill. Sight is arguably the most important sense for safety and self-preservation. The lack of vision takes away one's ability to properly assess their surroundings, therefor limiting the awareness of immediate dangers and affecting their mobility.

One might debate that other senses will compensate for vision loss. Although many members of the blind community exercise their listening skills, this is not always a reliable method of assessing the immediate environment. Many threats are inaudible, including quiet vehicles that are driving or reversing from stalls, bicyclists zipping around, and of course everyone's favorite – speed bumps.

Providing the appropriate accommodations by allowing access to parking for disabled persons will minimize the very many dangers present to the blind community, so I fully support HB 646.

February 1, 2017

From: Fay Solomon, Blind Resident

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair
Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair
Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member
Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member
Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member
Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member
Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017

Time: 9:00am

Room Conference Room 329

I support this bill to allow the Blind to obtain parking placard. I am elderly and often have people drive me to doctor appointments. Walking is not my problem. I am slower now but I cannot see or hear too good. I am always scared to walk in parking lots where drivers don't look where they are going or drive too fast. This placard will allow my driver to park close to the building and I would feel safe when I am going in and out of the building. Please pass this bill to help keep the Blind safe.

Respectfully,
Fay Solomon (Blind)

February 1, 2017

From: Tammy chow, Blind resident

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:

Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair

Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair

Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member

Rep. Ken Ito, Member

Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member

Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member

Rep. Gene Ward, Member

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I Tammy Chow support HB 646 because I am legally blind an over age 60. I have personal driver who drives me to the doctors, stores, and to meetings. Sometimes we have to park very far away and I get confussed of where we parked and my friend has to leave me standing alone while he looks for the car. A few times when he left me alone, someone tride to steal my purse and some people try to beg me for money. I don't feel safe. But if I can get a handicap placard I would not have to worry about my safety. Please pass this bill.

Respectfully,
Tammy Chow (Blind)

February 1, 2017

From: Roberta K. AuYoung, Blind resident

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:

Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair
Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair
Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member
Rep. Ken Ito, Member
Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member
Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member
Rep. Gene Ward, Member

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I support HB646 to allow the Blind to obtain parking placard due to safety reasons. I work with blind seniors and I have heard some of their concerns about safety when their personal drivers have to park far from the entrance to a store or hospital. Many of them have been left alone by the entrance of the establishment and accosted by individuals who mean to harm and steal from them. I am legally blind and safety is a big issue for myself so I can identify with my clients fears of being left vulnerable as their drive parks or retrieves the car. So please vote yes to this amendment of this bill.

Respectfully,
Roberta K. AuYoung

February 1, 2017

From: Sharon Ige

To: Committee on Human Services:
Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair
Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair
Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member
Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member
Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member
Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member
Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

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I am in support of Bill 646 because of the following reasons:

It has come to my awareness that it would be much easier for the driver of the blind. Depending on the blind person's mobility, the driver does not have to guide the blind person after parking a far distance. If they can park in the handicapped stalls, it would be a shorter distance of assistance, if needed. Also, the handicapped stall is a safe place to drop off and wait.

Most importantly, blind people are not safe in a parking lot. For those who get out of a car and walk independently, it can be a risky experience. I recently have heard of more incidents of the blind getting hit by drivers who did not see them. Because of our inability to "see" them, we do not get out of the way either. The loud noises of cars, people and other goings on prevent us from fully getting a grip on the situation. We have enough problems trying to read traffic on the roadways. But now have to navigate a crowded parking lot with drivers who are speeding or not paying attention. Not to mention that we cannot hear the new hybrid cars even if there is not unusually loud noise around.

It has been said that blind people should not have a placard because they do not drive but many current placard holders do not drive either. Placards should be given to those who need them.

Although I have not felt passionate about this bill in the past, it is evident to me that it has become a safety issue.

Thank you for your consideration on this matter.

Sincerely,
Sharon Ige

February 2, 2017

From: Victoria Kennedy Blind Resident & Guide Dog Angela

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair

Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair

Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member

Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member

Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member

Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member

Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

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Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share with you, my thoughts about HB646 – Placard for the visually impaired and for the blind.

I was diagnosed legally blind with Reinitis Pigmentosa in 1978, and became totally blind in 2000. I was a cane user for 12 years, and since 2000, I have been a guide dog handler.

Over the years, with the advent of technology, especially with the smart phones, and now, with the popularity of the electric cars (which are good for the environment but horrible to us, the blind, who cannot also hear them approach), I find myself being afraid to walk in large parking lots with my guide dog.

As I walk in large parking lots with my husband or friends who drive me to the various stores, my guide will alert me if a car is backing up. Unfortunately, all too often cars back up without even looking to see if people are walking behind them. More and more drivers are not paying attention as they are talking on the cell phones, texting, or emailing others. Increasingly, my husband who is sighted, has had to hit the trunk of cars which are suddenly backing up, and the drivers are usually startled to find him and others behind the car.

If we could be allowed to have a placard, it would not only be a safety factor for us, we can always find our way back to our car when we are done with our shopping, tired of walking, or my guide dog is hot and is in need of water. Though blind, I will be able to find our car as we will be sure to know what store we parked in front of, and with applications on our I-phones, we can mark where the car is parked, and will be able to find it without very little problems.

When I lived in California, I was issued a placard due to my blindness, and was stunned that the state of Hawaii wouldn't issue a placard for the blind.

Being able to have our car in a handicapped parking space would certainly instill a very real level of safety for me, and I will be able to walk to the stores with confidence, knowing that I wouldn't have to dodge cars, listen for cars backing up, and having the fear of being hit and hurt badly or worse.

There was one other experience I had that frightened me so, that could be prevented if we could park at the curb in a handicapped spot. When using my cane and walking across a parking lot, I once had a car pull up slowly beside me and a passenger grabbed my purse from my shoulder and the car took off. I was so very fortunate not to fall under the rear tires.

I ask that you please consider the safety issues of allowing those of us who are blind to be allowed to have a placard to be able to have our spouse/friend park in a handicap parking space.

Mahalo and thank you for your consideration.

Aloha,

Vickie and "Angela" Kennedy

February 2, 2017

From: Laura Tanigawa (Blind Resident)

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:
Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair
Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair
Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member
Rep. Ken Ito, Member
Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member
Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member
Rep. Gene Ward, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017
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I feel that parking passes should be available to all handicapped/disabled people but for today. I am going to explain why a VIP (visually impaired person) or a blind person should be allowed to have one.

When I walk to and from places, I am totally focused and concentrating to make sure I don't trip, fall or walk into things that by the time I get home I am more mentally exhausted from focusing all day than physically exhausted. Even when I have a sighted guide to help me, it will be a friend or family member helping and they are not experts so I still have to focus and concentrate to make sure we don't have an accident. I can feel my guide's tension focus when they are guiding me and I noticed that when we finally get to our location, they relax and so do I and can finally have some fun and enjoy ourselves. When we get to our location, the ground is usually flat and even so we can relax. Because I don't or not allowed to have a parking pass and had to park some distance away, I have been guided into fenders of cars, walked into side mirrors of cars, tripped and fallen. I feel the above situation can be avoided if I a blind person was allowed to have a parking pass. The parking pass will help me and my guide to relax and it will help and make it easier for my helper. Just as a person in a wheelchair, having a parking pass helps their helper more than the person in the wheelchair. But it does also helps the person in the wheelchair because avoiding the bumps, holes and uneven grounds so that they are not jostled around in their chair which can be painful.

Finally, we the VIP and blind people should be allowed to have the parking pass so that we and our helpers may receive the help and benefits the pass will provide us.

Laura Tanigawa

February 2, 2017

From Jim Kennedy

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:
Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair
Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair
Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member
Rep. Ken Ito, Member
Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member
Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member
Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member
Rep. Gene Ward, Member

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Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017
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"Aloha, I am writing as the husband of a wonderful, self-confident lady who has been legally blind since 1978 and totally blind since 2000. I bring a perspective from two points of view: that of a caring husband and that as an observer.

"My wife is fiercely independent! I am proud of her. For years she was a cane user, and since 2000 she has been partnered with two incredibly smart and trustworthy guide dogs. She asks for no sympathies. Given an obstacle, she tries her best to figure out ways to address them. This almost always works. However, as admirable as this attitude and confidence is, it is in my opinion not able to ameliorate the problems with all the distractions that we are faced with by today's drivers. I think most reasonable people will have to agree that things have changed exponentially in just the past few years: electric cars you cannot hear, and smart phones causing s=distractions, being among the greatest concerns.

"Obviously, because I care, we walk together as we traverse parking lots. I cannot tell you how many times I have had to bang my fist HARD on the trunks of cars backing out of spaces as we walk carefully behind them, to get them to realize they have to stop fast. Most of these drivers seem to be not paying much attention. Also, too many today seem to be TOO distracted talking on cell phones, texting or checking emails, especially as they start to pull away from parking spots ... carrying on the communications without fully being aware of what is going on right around them. People who are legally blind are purely at the mercy of these drivers and those who are accompanying them. They should not be, in my honest opinion. Being able to park in a handicapped spot near the curb would eliminate these concerns!

"It seems to me, in a very real way, the blind may unwittingly be being discriminated against. I say this because while in every legal sense they are disabled, for some reason are not afforded the same kind of protective allowances provided those with other kinds of disabilities. Why do so many segments of the disabled get accommodation, and not the blind?

"It seems to me that it should be axiomatic that accommodations by the issuance of parking placards are aimed to protect the disabled. Why, then, are the blind so "blindly" discarded in this care and concern, when their safety should be of equal concern?

"I am sorry I cannot make the hearing this Friday, but do thank you for your consideration, and would welcome the opportunity to talk any time you would like about these very critical safety matters.

"Mahalo for your considerations."

Jim Kennedy
91-1012 Kaipalaoa Street #5506
Ewa Beach, HI 96706

tel. cell 224-7639

e-mail: jimkennedy513@gmail.com

February 2, 2017

From: Gail Sakamoto

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair
Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair
Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member
Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member
Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member
Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member
Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017

Time: 9:00am

Room Conference Room 329

My name is Gail Sakamoto and I am a blind vendor at the Dept. of Health. I support house bill 646 that allows the blind to obtain handicap placard. Sometimes I have a hard time navigating through very dark parking lots. I have tripped over tire stoppers, speed bump and root that protrude from under the asphalt of some parking lots. It's not safe for us who are visually impaired and its worse for my friends who are blind. Please consider passing this bill.

Thank you,
Gail Sakamoto

February 2, 2017

From: Richard Koja

To: Committee on Human Services:
Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair
Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair
Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member
Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member
Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member
Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member
Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017
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My name is Richard Koja and I support this bill because in my experience I've been accosted in by homeless people while I waited for a my driver to get the car. It would be safe for me if I had a handicap placard so when I have someone who can take me where I need to go, we will be able to park closer to the entrance of the store. Also trying to navigate parking lots that are riddled with tire stoppers and speed bumps become a very dangerous obstacle for me. I am completely blind and I try my best to pay attention and sometimes I have to wonder who is really blind, especially when cars back out of their stalls without warning. Please give deep consideration to this bill to not only allow the blind to obtain the placard but think of the fatalities you'll help to prevent. Thankyou very much.

February 2, 2017

From: Christopher Akamine, Blind Vendor, Liliuokalani Building

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair

Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair

Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member

Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member

Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member

Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member

Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017

Time: 9:00am

Room Conference Room 329

Dear committee Chair Morikawa and members,

My name is Christopher Akamine and I am a blind vendor in the Liliuokalani Building. I am in favor of this bill.

February 2, 2017

From: Joy Nakata-Muranaka

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair

Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair

Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member

Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member

Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member

Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member

Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

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Room Conference Room 329

I am Joy Nakata-Muranaka and I support HB 646.

I am totally blind. Safety is an important issue. Some individuals have other issues such as hearing/equilibrium/balance; some are unsteady on their feet and get disorientated easily. In the life of a visually impaired person, he/she deals with orientation issues daily. With the use of a parking placard, the shorter distance required to walk and the less turning to move around the stall/lane/cars the better sense of balance, orientation and safety a blind individual can maintain. The blind has many challenges each day of life.

There have been many occurrences where when walking through a parking lot, other drivers are not watching and the person assisting me suddenly stops or if I am walking with my guide dog, needs to say stop or grabs my arm.

The parking placard will permit less complication when being driven anywhere and not have to deal with walking so far, having to cross lanes and watching for inattentive drivers, keeping our orientation, and more safety will be achieved.

February 2, 2017

From: Norman Ota (Blind Vendor)

To: Committee on Intrastate Commerce:

Rep. Takashi Ohno, Chair

Rep. Isaac W. Choy, Vice Chair

Rep. Romy M. Cachola, Member

Rep. Ken Ito, Member

Rep. Richard H. K. Onishi, Member

Rep. James Kunane Tokioka, Member

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Member

Rep. Gene Ward, Member

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Hearing Date: Friday, February 3, 2017

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Conference Room 329

My name is Norman Ota and I support this bill!

February 2, 2017

From: Nora Ota-Burrows (Blind)

To: Committee on Human Services:

Rep. Dee Morikawa, Chair

Rep. Chris Todd, Vice Chair

Rep. Della Au Bellati, Member

Rep. Sharon E. Har, Member

Rep. Bertrand Kobayashi, Member

Rep. Marcus R. Oshiro, Member

Rep. Andria L. Tupola, Member

Reference: Measure Number HB646

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Room Conference Room 329

My name is Nora Ota Burrows and I support this bill.