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April 3, 2018

TO: The Honorable Scott Y. Nishimoto, Chair
House Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **HCR 162 HD1 /HR 138 HD1 - REQUESTING THE HAWAII STATE JUDICIARY
AND DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES TO NOT USE BLINDNESS AS A
BASIS FOR DENYING PARENTAL RIGHTS**

Hearing: Wednesday, April 4, 2018, 2:30 PM
Conference Room 325, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the resolution and offers the following comments.

PURPOSE: This resolution protects parental rights for blind parents or prospective blind parents in the context of child welfare, foster care, family law, and adoption.

DHS is an equal opportunity service provider and follows all federal and state laws, regulations, and rules that prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability.

DHS agrees that blindness shall not be the basis for denial or restriction of custody, visitation, adoption, or guardianship of children. DHS is also aware of national reports that parents who are deaf or blind report high rates of child removal and loss of parental rights.

However, DHS Child Welfare Services (CWS) Branch is not aware of instances of discrimination against blind individuals within our programs and services. Additionally, the DHS Civil Rights Office reports no discrimination complaints have ever been filed by blind parents or on behalf of blind parents with the Department. Clear information on how to file a complaint is available on the DHS website or is provided upon request.

DHS is fully committed to the intent of the measure and to improve our service delivery model. We will examine our staff training curriculum to include more information about

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working with parents with disabilities and blind parents, specifically, and will consult with our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to improve the way we engage with parents who are blind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

LATE

HR-138-HD-1

Submitted on: 4/3/2018 3:27:58 PM

Testimony for JUD on 4/4/2018 2:30:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Melodie Aduja	the Oahu County Committee on Legislative Priorities of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i	Support	No

Comments: