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

February 25, 2020

TO: The Honorable Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 2417 HD1 – RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES**

Hearing: February 26, 2020, 12:00 P.M.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol

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

PURPOSE: The purpose of the bill requires DHS to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents. Appropriates funds. Repeals on 6/30/2021. Takes effect on 12/31/2059. (HD1)

DHS appreciates the intent of the measure as it may serve to supplement services for neighbor island residents, particularly in the area of transportation; however, the department respectfully notes that services described in the measure are currently available to eligible participants of our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Services for the Blind Branch, Ho`opono.

Ho`opono provides adjustment to blindness services, including Structured Discovery™ training, peer-to-peer mentoring, counseling, employment opportunities, low vision services and more to eligible individuals in their homes and communities via the Vocational Rehabilitation program, the New Visions program, and the Independent Living for Older Individuals who are Blind Program statewide.

Ho`opono's New Visions program is the only training center to hold Structured Discovery™ certification in the State of Hawaii. This certification was received from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board in 2008.

The proposed legislation requires that: "The department of human services shall identify and secure other sources of funding, including federal funding, to provide for matching funds for the pilot program...". If the measure passes, the department will attempt to secure such funding; however, this will likely be difficult due to existing federal funding already allocated for these service as noted above to serve DVR's clients statewide.

DHS also requests that any appropriation not supplant the budget priorities identified in the Executive Budget. Also, if the bill moves forward, DHS suggests extending the duration of the pilot as 1 year from the effective date is not enough time to implement and evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on this measure.

Harry Kim
Mayor



Roy Takemoto
Managing Director

Barbara J. Kossow
Deputy Managing Director

County of Hawai'i Office of the Mayor

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February 25, 2020

Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
Representative Ty J.K. Cullen, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance

Dear Chair Luke, Vice Chair Cullen, and Committee Members:

RE: HB 2417, HD1 Relating to Human Services

Although Hawai'i County has long had a Mayor's Committee on People With Disabilities, I confess that I was unaware of the extent to which services are available on Oahu to persons who are blind or have a significant visual impairment, but unavailable on the Neighbor Islands.

I thank the Deaf and Blind Task Force for identifying this gap and bringing it to the attention of our lawmakers. I am pleased to be able to support HB 2417, HD1, and pledge our County support for any pilot program that may be initiated if this bill passes.

I hope you will act favorably on HB 2417, HD1.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harry Kim
MAYOR

HB-2417-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2020 12:08:58 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2020 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
james gashel	National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii	Support	Yes

Comments:

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF HAWAII

Testimony before the committee on Finance

House of Representatives

State of Hawaii

Thirtieth Legislature

Regular Session of 2020

February 26, 2020, 12:00 PM hearing on H B 2417 HD 1

Good afternoon Madam chair, Vice Chair, and members of the Finance committee. My name is James Gashel. I am a resident of Honolulu and live at 2801 Coconut Avenue. I am testifying today on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii.

Madam chair, I want you to know of our strong support for H B 2417, giving particular thanks to representative Hashimoto, for introducing this bill. If enacted, and I hope it will be enacted, HB2417 will bring hope and opportunity to blind people on our neighbor islands largely left out under current programs.

Why is this bill needed, and why do we support it? Members of the NFBHI know the need here and on our neighbor islands because of our first-hand experience as blind people. All of our elected leaders and by far the majority of our members are blind people. This bill has our passionate support because of the experience of our own lives. Many of us have been blessed to receive excellent blindness related training, which we have here living on Oahu. We know that the real problems of blindness come more from lack of good training and lack of opportunities than from loss of eye sight. My heart goes out to those on our neighbor islands who have not yet learned this truth. Every day without good training leads to missed opportunities and lost time which cannot be recovered.

On its face, the unmet needs relating to sight loss for people on our neighbor islands are compelling and cry out for a solution, but what about the cost? I know that is your concern and your responsibility. Cost is our concern too. The state cannot and should not duplicate existing programs; to do so would not be sensible, would not be cost effective, and would certainly not be practical. This does not mean doing nothing, for to do nothing also has costs in wasted lives and lost productivity. The fact that these costs are largely hidden does not mean that the costs don't exist. They do.

The genius of HB 2417 is to propose a test; a pilot program. Rather than having the state duplicate what is already available here on Oahu, why not harness the power of volunteerism, underwritten with funds provided by the state? Using the strength of a qualified core of volunteer trainers, experienced and capable blind people, the state can better realize its investment in the training programs currently supported at Ho'opono. What an innovative idea.

What would this cost? Our thought here is to recommend a twenty-one month pilot project at an approximate cost of \$500,000. This assumes the following:

As written, the bill proposes a contractor to handle the day to day details of the project. We assume that the contractor would need to have a project director, a training coordinator, and some amount of administrative support. We estimate a cost of about \$227,000 for these personnel and benefits costs over 21 months.

Services in this project would begin after the first startup month. We envision 20 actual service months, using 5 trained volunteers generally going from Oahu for in-home neighbor islands training sessions. Services would be provided during approximately 20

days per month, or about 200 training days in all over 20 months. Costs would essentially be travel and training materials estimated at \$121,000.

Aside from this one on one training, we also recommend funds for peer group counseling. This is an essential component of adjustment to blindness training. Peer group funds would pay travel costs of trainers to lead three support group sessions per month for 20 months and to pay travel costs for neighbor island residents to participate in two state and national blindness training conferences occurring during the project. These peer group counseling costs, essentially travel, are estimated at \$123,600 total for 20 months.

Finally, the bill recommends special needs transportation services. These funds would be used to pay costs for neighbor island project participants to receive vouchers for support for local transportation services. The 20 month cost of this voucher program is estimated at \$27,000 to include 90 participants to receive transportation vouchers valued at \$300 each.

Madam chair, Madam vice chair, and committee members, enactment of H B2417 would truly be a "win, win," proposition for the people of our state. The need on the neighbor islands is known and compelling. Building on the strength of services provided by the state on Oahu, we can and should do better for our peers who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed. Smart use of qualified volunteers will give blind people the chance to serve others. This approach is consistent with our values and our aloha spirit. Mahalo for your support to move this bill forward into law.

HB-2417-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/25/2020 2:23:00 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2020 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Melissa Gerber	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Testimony of Melissa Gerber

Before The House Finance Committee

State of Hawaii

Thirtieth Legislature

Regular Session of 2020

February 26, 2020, 12:00pm hearing on HB 2417

Good Afternoon Committee Members, My name is Melissa Gerber. I am a resident of Oahu and live in the heart of Kapolei. I cannot be there in person today so I appreciate the opportunity to send in my testimony. I am an Employment Programs Manager for a local Non-Profit that specialized in work adjustment and vocational placement for individuals with disabilities. I am also the Chapter President of the National Federation of the Blind Leeward Oahu Chapter and the 1st Vice President of the Hawaii Affiliate Board.

I want you to know of my strong support for HB 2417. If enacted, and I hope it will be enacted, this bill would require the Department of Human Services to establish and implement a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents, with funds to be appropriated for this purpose.

As a 49 year old blind individual myself, I understand the challenges that occur in day to day life. I have been able to overcome many of those challenges including getting off of Social Security due to obtaining education, training, and then substantial employment. However these goals have come at the cost of many struggles and battles over accommodations and equality. I have greatly benefited from being around other successful blind individuals I consider my mentors.

In spite of my current success there is a huge missing component in my life that I believe would have drastically changed my course towards success at a much younger age, this is the blind training bill HB2417 will provide for the outer island residence. If I had blind skills in Braille, technology, and mobility, I would have been equipped with the tools to give me the confidence in more situations.

Now as an adult I value these skills so much I am seeking out anyone and everyone that will volunteer their time to train me. Since I am working I cannot go through the 12 month residential blind adjustment training provided through State VR at Ho'opono. Many individuals I talk to on the outer islands have a similar struggle. Currently I have found an ONM Mobility Instructor by the name of Shellford Cantan who is volunteering his time to teach me cane travel. It is very valuable to me and has already begun to give me confidence. I believe this training will also open up more career and life opportunities I have never had before. For starters I would like to be a part of this effort to bring this training to our more than two thousand blind island neighbors.

I urge you all to vote to bring this service to the outer islands so they can have a chance to get so much more out of life than their sight perception may currently dictate. I am living proof that the right blind training works. It is not a miracle or some special senses super power, it is good training and education that all residence deserves and need access to!

HB-2417-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/24/2020 4:21:06 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/26/2020 12:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Justin Salisbury	Individual	Support	No

Comments:



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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February 26, 2020

LATE

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

House Bill 2417 HD1 – Relating to Human Services

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) strongly supports House Bill 2417 HD1, which will require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents. This bill will also appropriate funds for the pilot program.

It is acknowledged that high quality training for individuals who are blind and visually impaired is available through Ho'opono, but this training is only offered on Oahu. Individuals who reside on the neighbor islands who are eligible participants of Division of Vocational Rehabilitation services may travel to Oahu to receive this training, but doing so may be overly burdensome. Having a training program that is physically located on the neighbor islands would go a long way in reducing this burden.

Additionally, HB 2417 HD1 proposes that the pilot program provide special needs transportation assistance to its participants. This would require DHS to work with neighbor island transportation service providers and other individuals to create a special needs transportation assistance service network to serve participants. Such a requirement would be a significant step in promoting independence and social integration for individuals who are blind and visually impaired, especially for those who reside in areas where public transportation is infrequent or not available at all.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett, 2943 Kalakaua Ave. Honolulu, HI, 96815

808-722-4243 808virgil@gmail.com

LATE

To: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 26, 2020

TIME: 12:00 P.M.

PLACE: Conference Room 308, State Capitol

HB 2417, HD1, RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES.

Requires DHS to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents. Appropriates funds.

Madam chair, and members of the Committee. My name is Virgil. I am a resident of Honolulu. I am the newly elected President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, having served on our board as a director for over 20 years.

I am in strong support of HB 2417, HD1, which would provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents, with funds to be appropriated for this purpose.

I became blind in 1996, as a fully sighted adult. Initially I did not have the opportunity for excellent training, but in 2005 that opportunity changed which has enabled me to live a full life in a career of my choice and active in my community. Yet, I know and have known thousands of other blind people who have not had the same opportunity. Every day without good training leads to missed opportunities and lost time which cannot be recovered.

I am a witness to the need for blindness related quality services. With that opportunity my blindness gave me a full and productive life reducing my blindness to a mere nuisance. It can happen in the lives of



others if given the opportunity for blindness related training, including outreach and encouragement provided by other people who are blind.

Enactment of HB 2417, HD1 would be life changing for the blind of Hawaii. The need on the neighbor islands is known and acknowledged. Building on the strength of services provided by the state on Oahu, we can and should do better for our peers who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed. Smart use of qualified volunteers will give blind people the chance to serve others. This approach is consistent with our values.

Mahalo for your kokua into moving this bill forward into law.



LATE

Testimony of Katie Keim, 2943 Kalakaua Ave. Honolulu, HI, 96815, 808-722-4242, 808keim@gmail.com

To: COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Rep. Sylvia Luke, Chair

DATE: Wednesday, February 26, 2020

TIME: 12:00 P.M.

PLACE: Conference Room 308, State Capitol

HB 2417, HD1, RELATING TO HUMAN SERVICES.

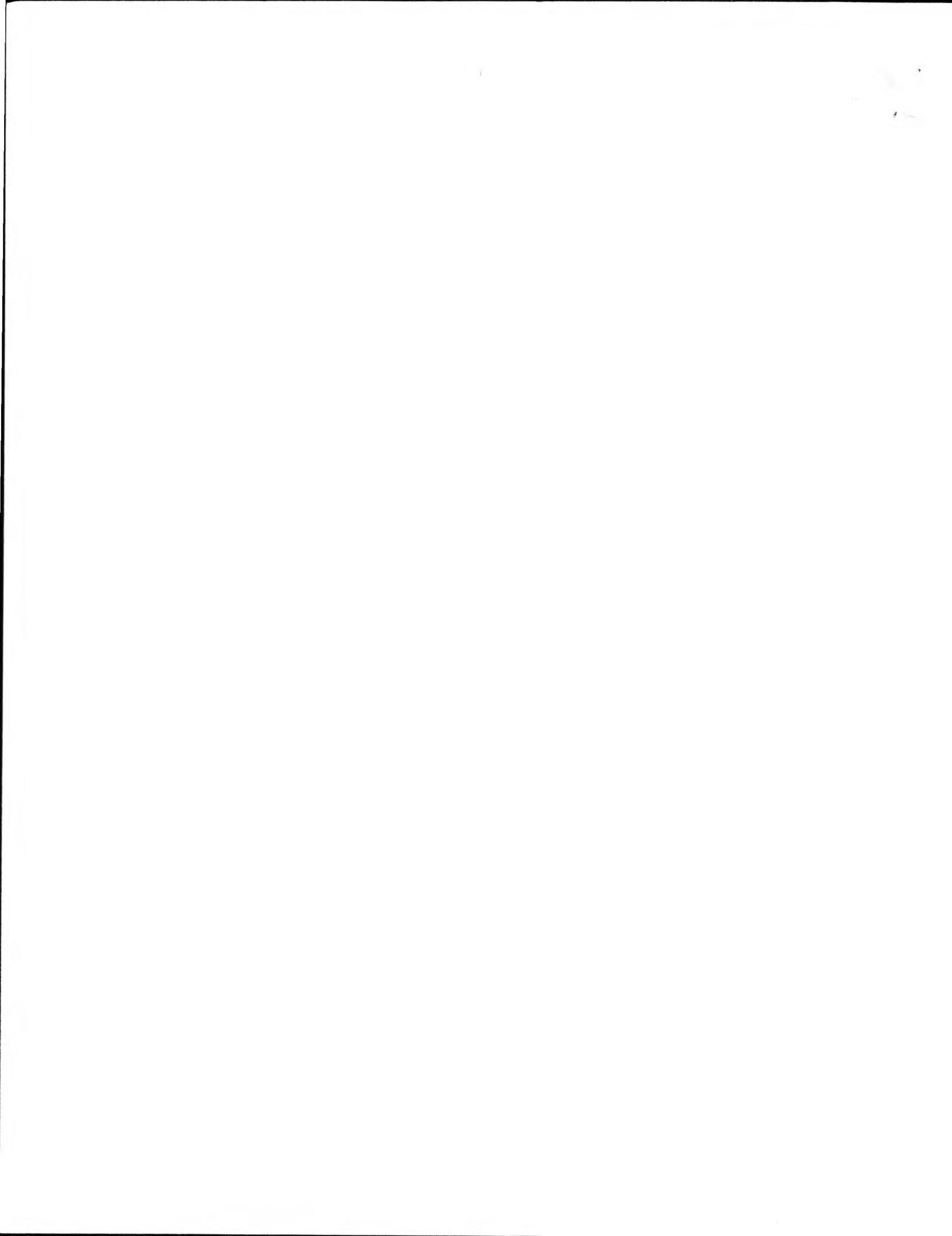
Requires DHS to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents. Appropriates funds.

Good morning Madam Chair and members of the Committee. My name is Katie. I am a resident of Honolulu. I serve on the Hawaii board of directors of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, recently elected as the 2nd Vice President, having served as the statewide secretary for over 16 years.

I am in strong support of H B 2417, HD1, which would provide services and training for blind and visually impaired neighbor island residents, with funds to be appropriated for this purpose.

I became blind in 1995 as a fully sighted 36 year old adult and was blessed to have the opportunity to receive excellent blindness training. But I know and have known thousands of other blind people who have not had the same opportunity. Every day without good training leads to missed opportunities and lost time which cannot be recovered.

During my career over 10 years ago, I served as an instructor for Ho'opono. One of my duties assigned was instructing blind individuals in blindness related skills enabling them more opportunity on the island of Hawaii. As 1 person, I was able to serve very few of our many neighbor island individuals desperate for this kind of opportunity and training. Yet the individuals I was able to give instruction, counseling and peer support to, have had their lives changed for the better. Many are now my colleagues in the National Federation of the Blind, mentoring other blind individuals and being positive examples in their community, changing what it means to be blind.



Enactment of H B 2417, HD1, would provide the opportunity for exposure to blindness training, which in turn enables our blind Hawaii residents to become and live a full and productive life.

It can happen in the lives of others if given the opportunity for blindness related training, including outreach and encouragement provided by other people who are blind.

Enactment of H B 2417, HD1, would be life changing for the blind of Hawaii. The need on the neighbor islands is known and acknowledged. Building on the strength of services provided by the Department of Human Services, on the island of Oahu, we can and should do more for our peers who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed. Smart use of qualified volunteers will give blind people the chance to serve others. This approach is consistent with our values.

Mahalo for your kokua to move this bill forward into law.

