



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

February 3, 2020

TO: The Honorable Representative Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services and Homelessness

FROM: Pankaj Bhanot, Director

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

Hearing: February 7, 2020, 9:00 A.M.  
Conference Room 329, 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 06/30/2021.

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.

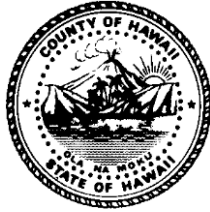
Ho`opono's New Visions program is the only training center to hold Structured Discovery™ certification in the State of Hawaii. This certification was received from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board in 2008.

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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January 30, 2020

Representative Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
Representative Nadine K. Nakamura, Vice Chair  
Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

Dear Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Nakamura, and Committee Members:

**RE: HB 2417, 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, 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.

Respectfully Submitted,

Harry Kim  
MAYOR

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 1/31/2020 5:33:53 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Louis Erteschik	Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	No

Comments:

To: Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair  
and Members of the Human Services and Homelessness Committee

From: Deannie Nakaza, Member of the National Federation of the Blind,  
Honolulu Chapter

Date: Friday, February 7, 2020

Time: 9:00 am

Place: Conference Room 329, State Capitol

Subject: In Support of H.B. No. 2417 Relating to Human Services

I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind, Honolulu Chapter. Also, I am a student earning my Masters degree at the Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work. I am writing in support of H.B. No. 2417.

I support H.B. No. 2417 because it will provide support, training, services and transportation to the blind and severely visioned impaired on the neighbor islands, so that they are able to live a quality life and be a part of their community. For Oahu residents like myself, accessibility of services are within reach, unlike for the residents on the neighbor islands.

Being able to see clearly is a privilege within itself. Although for some, vision is manageable, for others it is not and it is a lifetime of lifestyle modification. Prior to being diagnosed legally blind, I was independent and I would holo holo here and there. Less than a year ago, I find myself making lifestyle adjustments. My sense of independence was stripped away and most of all, my driving privilege was taken away. Now, my only means of transportation is to be fully dependent upon the Handivan and family members.

According to the Center for Disease and Control Prevention (CDC) nearly 3.4 million of Americans are legally blind or visually impaired are over the age 40. In 2016, the CDC reported that the State of Hawaii has over 24,500 registered blind or visually impaired

residents and 31% are over the age of 65. Of the 24,500 majority has either relocated to Oahu due to limited services and transportation or is secluded from services. Besides, just imagine how many residents are not registered due to the lack of services or transportation?

Therefore, if we deny or limit the blind and visually impaired the opportunity to sustain and maintain self-sufficiency and social inclusion, what other opportunities will they have to experience a quality life?

By appropriate funding to the Department of Human Services, it will assist the the blind and visually impaired to participate in social and economic activities. So, I urge the committee to pass H.B. No. 2417.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 2/5/2020 1:16:13 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
james gashel	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Testimony of James Gashel

Before The Committee on Human Services and homelessness

House of Representatives

State of Hawaii

Thirtieth Legislature

Regular Session of 2020

February 7, 2020, 9 am hearing on H B 2417

Good morning Madam chair, Madam vice chair, and members of the HSH Committee. My name is James Gashel. I am a resident of Honolulu and live at 2801 Coconut Avenue; just about right at the base of Diamond Head. Although I wish I could attend this hearing in person, it is an honor for me to present this testimony in writing, and I thank you for the opportunity. Aside from testifying in this hearing as an interested individual, I should also note that I serve on the National board of directors of the National Federation of the Blind, elected as the corporate secretary for about the last 10 years.

Madam chair, I want you to know of my strong support for H B 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.

Why is this bill needed, and why do I support it? Let me answer the second question first. I am blind and have lived a full life as a blind person for 73 years since the day I was born in 1946. Consequently, I am speaking to you from firsthand experience. I have been blessed every day to have received superior blindness related training, but I know and have known thousands of other blind people who have not had the same opportunity. My heart goes out to them. Every day without good training leads to missed opportunities and lost time which cannot be recovered. For many, I know that blindness seems to impose insurmountable barriers, but I also know that this need not be so. Blindness need not be a barrier to living a full and productive life. In fact, it is literally true that the impact of blindness on a person's life and livelihood can be reduced to nothing more than a mere nuisance. That has happened in my life, and 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.

Section 1 of this bill finds there are approximately 12 thousand people in our state who are blind or visually impaired; most live on Oahu. About two thousand live somewhere on our neighbor islands. As a result, it is logical that the most comprehensive and by far the best blindness related training services are available on Oahu, due to economies of scale. We are fortunate in Hawaii to have high quality training for the blind provided by our state program called Ho'opono, and its New Visions training center under the Department of Human Services. I hope you will take the opportunity some time soon to visit this program.

Of course it is true that neighbor island residents may receive training at Ho'opono, but this often requires a period of from 6 to 8 months and some times more, leaving home, for example on the big island, and moving to Oahu, at least during the time of training. This is great for those who can do it, but expecting people to be uprooted from their families and home environments should not be their only option. H B 2417 says we can do better.

At its core this bill acknowledges the need for a supplemental services program for blind and visually impaired people who are neighbor island residents. The services authorized would not replace training at Ho'opono; quite the opposite. More than anything else, this bill would give neighbor island residents a pathway out of isolation.



This bill means hope for better opportunities to enable blind and visually impaired people to improve their lives.

Section 2 of the bill includes a detailed list of services described as peer to peer outreach, sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, and mobility training. Six specific services are authorized as follows:

1. outreach to identify individual and program needs;
2. adjustment services, including individual and group counseling;
3. communications development, including access technology awareness and training;
4. daily living, self care, and home management skills;
5. orientation and mobility training; and
6. peer support and other services to help participants sustain independence and social integration.

Support for transportation, referred to as "special needs transportation," would also be provided. This section recognizes the serious limitations faced by blind and visually impaired people who are unable to drive but live in areas where having access to and use of a vehicle is a necessity since public transportation is infrequent or often not available at all. nonetheless, support for special needs transportation is intended to supplement and not replace any public transportation services available.

Regarding the six services listed as outreach and training, the advantage of peer support provided by qualified volunteers is fundamental to this bill. Think of it as blind people helping other blind people. Who could be more motivated to help others than those of us who have had the advantages which come from excellent training and services? We are the aloha state. When this bill is passed blind people will have the opportunity to reach out and teach other blind people; expressing the aloha spirit with our peers on the neighbor islands. Please help us to use our skills in service to the state and to our fellow blind people in need within our state.

Madam chair, Madam vice chair, and committee members, enactment of H B 2417 would truly be a "win, win," proposition for the people of our state. 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 piers 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 support to move this bill forward into law.

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 1/28/2020 7:26:25 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Carmie Spellman	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 1/29/2020 5:24:31 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Justin Salisbury	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

This is a wonderful bill, and it addresses a tremendous need in the blind community. These services will change the lives of blind people on the neighbor islands.

Justin Mark Hideaki Salisbury, MA, NOMC, NCRTB, NCUEB

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 1/31/2020 10:03:18 PM

Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Cory Harden	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha legislators,

Please support these sorely needed services. My daughter is blind and lives in Hilo. The only services for blind people she receives is to attend the Ho'opono meeting once a month, if her assistant can take her.

mahalo,

Cory Harden

**LATE**

**HB-2417**

Submitted on: 2/6/2020 4:51:07 PM  
Testimony for HSH on 2/7/2020 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Martin Hodapp	Disability Rights Hawaii	Support	No

Comments:

Disability Rights Hawaii supports the creation of a training program for blind and visually impaired people on the neighbor islands. We agree with the premise of the bill that training opportunities are few and far between for individuals who do not live on the Big Island.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett, 2943 Kalakaua Ave. Honolulu, HI, 96815, 808-722-4243,  
808virgil@gmail.com

To the Committee on Human Services and homelessness

House of Representatives, State of Hawaii

February 7, 2020, 9 am hearing on H B 2417

**LATE**

Madam chair, Madam vice chair, and members of the HSH 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 H B 2417, 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. 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.

I am a witness to the need for blindness related quality services that with the right 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 H B 2417 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.

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

To the Committee on Human Services and homelessness

House of Representatives, State of Hawaii

February 7, 2020, 9 am hearing on H B 2417

**LATE**

Madam chair, Madam vice chair, and members of the HSH 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 secretary for over 16 years.

I am in strong support of H B 2417, 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 worked 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. Enactment of H B 2417 would provide the opportunity for exposure to blindness training, which in turn with this opportunity, blindness can become 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 H B 2417 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 support to move this bill forward into law.