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STATE OF HAWAII  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**

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March 10, 2021

TO: The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
House Committee on Education

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HCR 32/HR 25 – URGING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A PROGRAM TO RECRUIT AND EMPLOY QUALIFIED BLIND PERSONS TO SERVE AS ORIENTATION AND MOBILITY INSTRUCTORS AND IN OTHER POSITIONS AS TEACHERS OF VISUALLY IMPAIRED STUDENTS**

Hearing: Thursday, March 11, 2021, 2:00 p.m.  
Via Videoconference

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the proposed resolutions as it provides expanded educational and employment opportunities for individuals with visual impairments.

We defer to the Department of Education on the impact this proposal may have on its services.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the resolution is to encourage the Department of Education (DOE) to develop and implement a program designed to recruit and employ qualified blind professionals to serve as orientation and mobility instructors, and in other positions as teachers of visually impaired students.

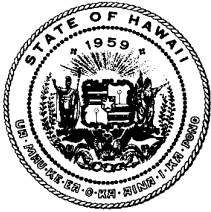
Ho`opono Services for the Blind, a branch of the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), offers a nationally accredited adult residential blindness skills training program which is staffed by a team of professionals, many of whom are blind themselves. DVR's orientation and mobility instructors, and other instructors who are blind, have

contributed in great part to the success of adult students who have completed training for independent living. DVR's staff, certified by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB), are highly effective teachers and role models for DOE co-enrolled transition-age (high school) students, and adult participants in the Ho`opono Services for the Blind, New Visions Program.

Ho`opono Services for the Blind has received calls from parents of DOE students who are blind and visually impaired inquiring about the possibility of their children being provided blindness skills training from DVR's NBPCB-certified instructors. However, these students remain under the jurisdiction of the DOE.

Ho`opono Services for the Blind has programs in place to train and successfully place individuals who are blind and visually impaired in competitive, integrated employment nationwide as NBPCB certified instructors in areas such as orientation and mobility, home management, Braille, and other areas of rehabilitation teaching for the blind. DHS welcomes opportunities to collaborate with the DOE, especially the opportunity to provide qualified applicants for DOE positions.

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



## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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March 11, 2021

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

House Concurrent Resolution 32/House Resolution 25 – Urging the Department of Education to Develop and Implement a Program to Recruit and Employ Qualified Blind Persons to Serve as Orientation and Mobility Instructors and in Other Positions as Teachers of Visually Impaired Students.

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Concurrent Resolution 32/House Resolution 25, which urges the Department of Education (DOE) to develop and implement a program to recruit and employ qualified blind persons to serve as orientation and mobility instructors and in other positions as teachers of visually impaired students.

At the heart of this measure is the need for instructors who possess the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) to teach students who are visually impaired under the DOE. The NOMC includes training in teaching Structured Discovery Cane Travel, where methods and principles come from decades of lived experiences, attitudes, and techniques of blind individuals. Ho'opono Services for the Blind considers hiring individuals with the NOMC as a best practice.

Another recognized training method, the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification, provides a vision-centered approach to orientation and mobility services and emphasizes instructors who are sighted. This contrasts with the NOMC's Structured Discovery approach and emphasis on employing blind instructors.

Up until recently, only the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification was accepted by the DOE. This has resulted in the DOE having the personnel resources to provide vision-centered orientation and mobility services, but not the Structured Discovery approach. Students who are blind or vision impaired and their families should have all options available to them. Additionally, this has diminished employment opportunities for qualified blind persons. The Hawaii Teacher Standards Board now accepts the NOMC, but despite this change, there has not been an increased reliance on blind instructors with the NOMC and the DOE currently has no employees with such certification.

We strongly urge passage of this measure.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY SHAW  
Executive Director

**HCR-32**

Submitted on: 3/10/2021 2:55:48 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2021 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
HMS Lea Dias, DVR Ho`opono Services for the Blind	Department of Human Services	Comments	No

Comments:

I will testify on behalf of the Department of Human Services.

**HCR-32**

Submitted on: 3/9/2021 10:16:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 3/11/2021 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Stacie Fong	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

In support of HR25 and HCR32

As a single mom to a blind 2nd grader, I've dedicated my life to researching the best information, standards and methods regarding the education of my daughter. In my search, I've met numerous competent blind adults who live this life everyday, and have figured out what worked best for them. I look to them for advice to teach her in the ways she will have to learn. After all, who best to teach a blind child than a blind adult who already worked through the trials and tribulations and understand the certain nuances and obstacles they'll potentially face because they already live this life themselves?

The impact of COVID brought its own separate challenges. Immediately, all students and teachers were thrust into an online education, and I had to quit my job entirely in order to be her unpaid 1:1 aide at home, helping her through the technology she had no experience with. Her TVI (Teacher for Visually Impaired) also acknowledged her own technological limitations and asked me if I knew any blind adults who could help them both navigate this new online world. Luckily, I inquired with all my blindness resources and found the best blind tech experts on the mainland who were able to remotely teach them both how a blind person navigates Google classroom, slides, documents and assignments that the teacher posts. They immediately also had to change the type of computers/ equipment they were using because the blind teachers showed them what type of equipment they would need to start using in order to get further in life.

In the same respect, when teaching orientation and mobility, my daughter would most benefit from learning the methods of structured discovery, which only an NOMC certified person would know. Most are blind adults themselves who use these techniques every moment of their own life.

Currently, with COVID restrictions, parents are no longer allowed on campus. Every morning, I leave her at the gate and watch her, yelling out directions if she makes a wrong turn, or we wait until her aide or another teacher can guide her. However, this continued reliance on another person is unacceptable, when other kids even younger than her are expected to navigate the school independently. She had been limited to being taught certain routes, going only between point A to B. But expecting any child to

only stick to known specific routes unless guided by another person is not only limiting but also dangerous, lest she encounter the wrong individual to ask for directions. She needs to learn to explore and figure out where she is, where she needs to go, and different paths to get there on her own, which is why this bill is so pertinent to her education. It's long overdue to have the same kind of orientation and mobility training she will eventually need to be an independent student, learning to navigate and explore freely without having to always rely on another person. If we only limit them by not providing the methods already used by competent blind adults, we are creating the obstacles. Please support this resolution to provide equal access to methods and practices she so desperately needs to lead an independent life.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Stacie Fong