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DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

P. O. Box 339
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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.

HR-25

Submitted on: 3/10/2021 2:59:46 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
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.

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

The Honorable Representative Sylvia Luke, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Shellford V. Cantan Jr.

SUBJECT: **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**

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

Aloha Chairs. My name is Shellford V. Cantan Jr. I support House Resolution 25. As a blind individual, and as a certified mobility instructor with my National Orientation Mobility Certification, NOMC, I know personally the benefits of working with instructors who teach with the Structured Discovery method. As a child, I was raised on the Big Island in the district of Ka'u. I knew at an early age that I would go blind. Unfortunately my parents or teachers had no idea on how to prepare me for the world that I would eventually face as a blind adult. As a Junior in high school, the DOE assigned a teacher for the blind who had her COMS certification. My teacher happened to be sighted. She made the long trip out to Ka'u on several occasions to evaluate me and figure what kind of services I would benefit from. After completing her evaluation, she gave me a flashlight that could light up a football field. She never gave me a long white cane or felt braille was important enough for me to learn even though she knew that I suffered from an eye condition called Retinitis Pigmentosa, more commonly known as RP. Individuals who suffer from this eye condition lose vision over time and eventually go totally blind. After graduating from high school, my vision quickly deteriorated. I tried college but failed or dropped out completely 3 times because I had no blindness skills or the confidence to be successful. I eventually ended up at Ho'opono, Hawaii's state agency for the blind. There I attended the adult orientation program more commonly known as the New Visions adjustment to blindness Program. The program would eventually become one of the 6 training centers in the country to be certified by the National Blindness Certification Board, where they would be able to teach using structured discovery methods, a method of teaching developed by blind people for blind people. Many of my instructors at the center were blind. I didn't think it at the time, but this played a crucial part in my acceptance and growth as a blind person. For years I tried to hide my blindness. I would even force myself to rely on vision that was not very reliable. I often referred to myself as someone who had some vision issues, never referring to myself as blind. But

that all change when I was introduced to accomplished, confident, and very capable blind folks who were raising families and doing all the things I thought only sighted people did. Those instructors turned out to be the role models I desperately needed to overcome many of the barriers that both society and I had placed in front of my ultimate path to success and genuine happiness. Those role models ended up paving the way for my future career. In closing, I urge this committee to pass this resolution. The DOE should be actively recruiting individuals who are certified to teach with the structured discovery method because I know that if they receive this type of quality training as children, they will avoid many of the struggles I faced when I was growing up and the ones I faced as a young adult. Passing this resolution will create a much brighter future for the blind youth of Hawaii.

Mahalo,

Shellford V. Cantan Jr., NOMCT

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31st Session of the State Legislature of the State of Hawai'i

House Committee on Education (EDN)

Testimony for House Resolution 25 and House Concurrent Resolution 32 on Thursday, March 11, 2021 at 2:30 PM

Dear Education Committee Chair and Vice-Chair,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i. I am writing testimony in support of HR 25 and HCR 32. These joint resolutions will help to provide more opportunities for blind professionals to teach in our local educational system. I want to let you know that right now, there are no blind professionals that are employed in the Department of Education system here in Hawai'i to teach Orientation and Mobility or Braille to blind students. I am a product of the Department of Education here in Hawai'i. The level of services for blind children were poor when I was a blind student and are still poor for blind and visually impaired students today. The teachers in the educational system do not want to deal with the fact that their student may have to live with the facts of life and living with the effects of blindness. It is sad for the hundreds of blind children that grow up in the state of Hawai'i. I am submitting testimony in support of the testimony that was submitted on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

I would hope that my personal story that I explained above and my personal experiences as a blind student in the educational system would be enough to get your attention on this issue, but there is much more to the story. I have a personal testimony that blind people can teach students in this state. I had personal experience with the National Orientation and Mobility Certification. I attended the Louisiana Tech University to achieve this certification. I did not accomplish this goal, but I have the faith that those who are successfully certified in the field of Orientation and Mobility have the ability to teach any blind child in the field of Orientation and Mobility. The National Blindness Professional Certification Board was set up because the sighted professionals wanted to lock out the blind people that were certified in the field of Orientation and Mobility the ability to teach blind children and adults. For many years, the requirement to monitor students visually was used to prevent blind professionals from teaching Orientation and Mobility. The use of non-visual monitoring and the use of the long white cane will help the blind student much more than the current teaching techniques that are used by

teachers with vision. The techniques that are used in the structured discovery method of Orientation and Mobility allow the student to navigate their environment and community independently instead of depending on constant lessons from the sighted instructor in similar areas. I am sure you would not want to get stabbed in the gut every time you came across an obstacle. Last year, we put forward a resolution to ask the Department of Education in Hawai'i to adopt and recognize the use of the National Orientation and Mobility Certification. The teacher standards board responded in their testimony last year that they have already done this. In the last year, this body, or any other educational representative, has not reached out to the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i on this matter. So, you can believe if the DOE is really willing to make a difference this time. We have been burned so many time by this body of professionals, so we only can trust them on how far we could throw them. This resolution does two things. We are asking the Teacher Standards Board to not only prove that they have recognized the National Orientation and Mobility Certification as a certification that would qualify those to teach blind students in Hawai'i, and to actively recruit and employ blind professionals with the National Orientation and Mobility Certification. We would also call them to task for claiming that they are willing to finally willing to recognize our group, but not taking any real action on this measure. I again thank you for your time on this measure and would wish that your committee pass this bill along. It is a shame that students with disabilities are treated as second-class students under the Department of Education in Hawai'i. I am sure if you had a child with a disability and faced the low quality of services from the system that is supposed to prepare your child for adulthood, you would be appalled with this situation as well. Again, I thank you for reading my testimony and taking the time to consider this important issue to the organized blind of Hawai'i.

HR-25

Submitted on: 3/10/2021 11:37:10 AM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Leni Ebisutani	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am in support of House Resolution 25. As a blind individual who understands the importance of having blind role models as instructors, I do urge the committee to pass this resolution and have the DOE come up with a plan to actively recruit and hire individuals with structured discovery credentials.

Rachel Awa
Testimony before the Hawaii State House of Representatives
House Committee on Education EDN
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2021
March 11,2021, 2:00PM, hearing on HR25

Good Afternoon. Chairman, vice chair, and committee members. My name is Rachel Awa and I am a mother to a blind child, we are residing in Ewa Beach and my daughter attends a public school within our district. We are members of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, and I am in strong support of HR25 and HCR32 and the testimony submitted by The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii.

Please seriously consider supporting HR25 and HCR32 on Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) as a credential form of employment for the Department of Education (DOE). Currently my daughter is being taught by an Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) since she entered into the DOE system at 3 years old. Since 2016 I have be advocating for my daughter to receive Structured Discovery Cane Travel and due to the DOE not having a NOMC employees my daughter has not been able to gain access and training in Structured Discovery Cane Travel which is a great disadvantage to her learning how to successfully move around independently. You see, Structured Discovery Cane Travel is a type of training that teaches blind individual how to use their non-visual skills to access their environment and surrounding in a safe and productive manner. Teachers who have a NOMC teach from a non-visual aspect and from life experiences. Currently my daughter is being taught from a sighted individual which is good, but my daughter is learning how to move around her environment with very limited knowledge about her non-visual cues. For example, when my daughter who is completely blind walks across the street, she is unable to use the traffic lights or cross walk signals to determine if it is safe to cross. She needs to use sound cues, which are non-visual cues and knowledge of the traffic and direction of cars in order to safely cross the road. NOMC teachers are able and capable of teaching these skills effectively and safety which is what I want my daughter to have in order to be a successful member of her community.

Mahalo for taking my testimony today and please I urge you to pass HR25 and HCR32!

Aloha, Rachel Awa

Steven Awa
Testimony before the Hawaii State House of Representatives
House Committee on Education EDN
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2021
March 11,2021, 2:00PM, hearing on HR25

Good Afternoon. Chairman, vice chair, and committee members. My name is Steven Awa and I am a father to a blind child, we are residing in Ewa Beach and my daughter attends a public school within our district. We are members of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, and I am in strong support of HR25 and HCR32 and the testimony submitted by The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii.

Please seriously consider supporting HR25 and HCR32 on Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) as a credential form of employment for the Department of Education (DOE). Currently my daughter is being taught by an Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) since she entered into the DOE system at 3 years old. Since 2016 my wife has been advocating for my daughter to receive Structured Discovery Cane Travel and due to the DOE not having a NOMC employees my daughter has not been able to gain access and training in Structured Discovery Cane Travel which is a great disadvantage to her learning how to successfully move around independently.

My wife, Rachel Awa, has submitted her own testimony which you can reference so I don't want to repeat why we think NOMC is beneficial to our daughter. I do want to say that what she is currently learning in O&M with the DOE is not enough because she still can not navigate on her own successfully and is very disorientated unless someone is with her. I know we have to go through DOEs process to give her more time to learn and to have more evidence to show that the DOEs style of teach is not effective but I strongly wish the DOE would take a more proactive approach and see what NOMC can offer. I am involved in the blind community and I've seen how blind people who have NOMC training can get around independently on their own with such confidence. I wish the same for my daughter and urge the House to look into this so that not only my daughter, but all blind children can get the right training that will help them to be successful in the future rather than wasting time and resources in a method that is sub-optimal.

Mahalo for taking my testimony today and please I urge you to pass HR25 and HCR32!

Aloha, Steven Awa

Katie Keim
Testimony before the Hawaii State House of Representatives
House Committee on Education EDN
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2021
March 11, 2021, 2:00 PM, hearing on HR25

Good Afternoon. Chairman, vice chair, and committee members. My name is Katie Keim, a blind business woman, member of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, residing at 2943 Kalakaua Avenue in Honolulu. I am in strong support of HR25 and HCR32 affirming the Hawaii Department of Education hiring teachers NOMC certified. I am in support of the testimony submitted by the NFB of Hawaii.

For over 24 years, I have participated in the education, using NOMC structured discovery methods, of our Hawaii blind children. My role has been varied; as an advocate alongside the parent of the blind child, and as an independent instructor with the children or as a consultant to DOE on structured discovery methods for blindness skills with blind children (K-1)2.

NOMC methods are proven to be the most successful instruction of orientation and mobility along with other blind independent skills i.e. braille, daily living skills, to effectively and safely teach the blind children, in problem solving and non-visual techniques regardless of how much residual vision they have or not.

During my work, it is always a challenge to reteach or unteach skills that are designed to teach methods based on visual cues rather than learning from the get go, non-visual cues to orient and navigate during travel or daily activities independently, effectively and safely.

NOMC certification methods continue to be the proven "Cadillac" instruction for blind children; inclusive of mentoring programs by successful positive role models from blind adults. Using this formula, blind children grow up with a positive "I Can Do" attitude about themselves, a vital component of a blind persons self advocacy in their daily life.

Many of the children I worked with in their early years, without full time NOMC DOE instructors, had to participate in NOMC summer programs, transition and finally adult training centers using NOMC structured methods that could have been taught during their academic year within DOE by certified MOMC instructors. Their peers who are not blind, advanced directly into college or vocational opportunities without the loss of time it took for the blind student to get further non-visual training needed to succeed in their life vocational dreams.

Our children, "All Our Children" are the future! Mahalo for seriously considering our blind children's lives during their formative years, so they can have hope and success in their future as contributing working adults by passing HR24 and HCR32.

HR-25

Submitted on: 3/10/2021 1:41:57 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Tabatha Mitchell	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am writing in full support of HR25. As a mother to a blind child that has recently relocated to Hawaii, I have lived the impact of this resolution. I recently had an experience at Pearl Harbor I'd like to share with each of you.

My youngest daughter, Emerie, participated in a group led by Lisa Craig of DOE. Ms. Craig was leading a group of blind adults that were assembled with the National Park Service to improve the Pearl Harbor experience for blind patrons. My blind daughter, a current HS freshman in Hawaii public schools, was invited to participate by Ms. Craig. I'm pretty sure Eme was the youngest participant. I attended as Eme's "sighted guide" to help orient her to Pearl Harbor and the required activities.

I did very very little sighted guide with Eme throughout the day, and because it was a relatively large group, I naturally pulled out and ahead of the group to marshal at entrances. This technique allows blind people to travel independently by following verbal cues of landmarks or doors. I quickly realized that Lisa seemed surprised by my group marshaling. I am a mother to five active hiking kids, so this technique is employed by us for sighted and blind alike on the trails. Recognizing that most blind participants in the group were super dependent on others, I began to recognize that this is the result of their cumulative training. Being new to Hawaii & Hawaii DOE, I decided that it was prudent that Lisa Craig embrace that structured discovery was how we have trained & worked with Eme.

There was non-stop sighted guide for most participants throughout the day. And a whole lot of non-stop verbal step-by-step cuing for everyone.

I know that people come into blindness at all different places of loss and at various points in life, and I am not judging the skill levels or ability of others in the group to travel

independently with a cane. But I know where & when Eme has had what training and I know what certifications her trainers have had. I am a sighted parent raising a 14 year old blind daughter among 5 sighted children. We can all see the difference in her skills and capabilities when she is in any group of blind kids & adults. Yesterday was no different.

Eme simply moved so much more independently. It was an obvious difference.

I know this difference is because she has been trained with structured discovery methods since diagnosed as blind at age 3. I wish I could explain how just 2 weeks to train with blind cane instructors at CCB certified under NOMC elevated her ability. It should be common sense that capable & qualified blind people are ideal teachers of blind skills.

I wish the capabilities that come from being trained under an instructor certified under NOMC were easy to illustrate. The difference is very real. And it is very real stuff. Independent travel is what will enable my daughter to be an active working tax payer in Hawaii. A recipient of training under both certifications for the past 10 years, I would chose a NOMC certified blind instructor teaching structured discovery for my blind child any day of the week. Unfortunately, within Hawaii DOE as it currently stands, we do not have that choice.

Please let me know if there is any way we can help you with your endeavor to expand the training options for blind kids in Hawaii. As I said, I have lived this resolution. I have compared both camps and there is nothing better than the blind leading the blind.

My Testimony

Aloha my name is Jonah Kekaimoku Sniffen Jr. I am from Waimanalo and I am also a blind person. I am in full support of HR 25. I was born and raised here but I

lost my vision at the age of 20 due to Detached retina caused by being born premature it's called retinopathy of prematurity. So basically, when I was born, I had vision in my right eye but my left eye it was detached so I grew up with only one good eye. So, with glasses I went through school with no problems. But when I turned 20 years old the retina in my right eye detached leaving me with basically no usable vision. But I did Attend Ho'oponopono Services for the blind. The New Visions Adjustment to blindness training center here in Hawaii. Where only one instructor was sighted the rest were blind certified capable adults who just happened to be blind. Teaching me blindness skills to travel and live independently. One of the reasons I Believe the DoE should create a group to actively search and hire Blind certified teachers. Such as an orientation and mobility instructor or a VI teacher etc. The Blind student needs to witness and be surrounded by positive role models who are blind, because It will empower them because the blind teacher knows what they are going through. A sighted person even if they are qualified will never understand fully how we as blind people live and the challenges we face. The training center I attended taught me that I am more than my blindness and with proper training and skills with the right attitude I can live the life I want. My experience that I had from new visions was life changing I believe in having high expectations for blind people because low expectations creates barriers to our success. I just want the blind youth of Hawaii to receive the same type of encouragement that my blind instructors gave me. every blind student matter's and should have the same positive experience that I had while they are in school. I am now 27 years old in training to become a blind vender.

Thank you for reading my testimony Aloha and God bless.

Sincerely, Jonah Kekaimoku Sniffen Jr

Virgil Stinnett

Testimony before the Hawaii State House of Representatives

House Committee on Education EDN

Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2021

March 11, 2021, 2:00 PM, hearing on HR25

Good Afternoon. Chairman, vice chair, and committee members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, a blind entrepreneur, a leader and member of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, residing at 2943 Kalakaua Avenue in Honolulu. I am in strong support of HR25 and HCR32 affirming the Hawaii Department of Education hiring teachers NOMC certified. I am in support of the testimony submitted by the NFB of Hawaii.

For over 20 years, I have participated in the mentoring of our blind youth, using NOMC structured discovery methods and at one time was a certified NOMC travel instructor actively working teaching orientation and mobility in Hawaii.

I am personally a graduate of the NOMC instruction methods when I became blind as an adult 24 years ago. I was a student of a certified NOMC training center.

The first 10 years of my life as a blind working adult, were a daily challenge and I had very limited confidence, without the non-visual techniques used in MOMC methods. Today I run a large DOD contract and have over 90 employees I manage serving our military. Without the tools and confidence I learned from the NOMC training center, I would not be able to contribute to my community or travel around the world with my blind wife, independently and safely.

Mahalo for seriously considering our blind children's lives and their need for excellent blindness skills training offered with NOMC certification by passing HR24 and HCR32.

HR-25

Submitted on: 3/10/2021 2:23:44 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Victoria Ra	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Hi,

I am a blind person who would love for there to be more blind people in the education system as teachers. I went through the schools being taught by mostly fully sighted teachers. But if I had been exposed to more totally blind teachers, I would have felt empowered and given to understand that I could be a full member of society. Also, blind people sometimes have tips and tricks sighted teachers wouldn't think of because they don't have to live with the disability on a regular basis. Who better to teach someone the most effective way to live with blindness than another blind person who has been trained and certified in areas such as O&M, braille, and assistive technology?

Representation is important. Seeing ourselves represented in media, for example, validates our existence and normalizes it. If blind people are given the same opportunities to become teachers, this would better the future of all blind people as we would be seen as more capable by the public.

In summary, more blind teachers in the school system would benefit blind students because they'd see themselves in the teachers and be encouraged to dream bigger and aim higher, instead of being viewed as limited and pitiable. It could also set a precedent for more positive change for blind people if blind teachers interact more with the public.