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STATE OF HAWAII  
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I  
**DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES**  
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA  
Office of the Director  
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February 23, 2023

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 870 HD1 – RELATING TO THE NEIGHBOR ISLANDS BLIND AND VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED SERVICE PILOT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 24, 2023, 11:30 a.m.  
Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill, provides comments, and requests an extension of time to establish the pilot program. DHS respectfully requests that appropriations in this measure do not act to reduce or replace budget priorities identified in the executive budget or Governor's Messages.

**PURPOSE:** This bill requires the Department of Human Services to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program that provides training and other services to blind or visually impaired individuals residing on the neighbor islands. Requires the Department of Human Services to establish a working group and submit an implementation plan to the legislature before the regular session of 2024. Requires the Department to report to the legislature prior to the regular session of 2027. Appropriates funds. Repeals on 6/30/2027. Effective 7/30/3000. (HD1)

The Committee on Human Services amended the measure by:

- (1) Specifying that the pilot program shall end on July 30, 2027;

- (2) Changing the effective date to July 30, 3000, to encourage further discussion; and
- (3) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

DHS appreciates the opportunity to create more resources for neighbor island residents who are blind and visually impaired and not currently eligible for existing programs.

DHS respectfully notes that services described in the measure are currently available statewide to eligible participants of our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Services for the Blind Branch, Ho`opono. Various services are also provided by non-profit statewide centers for independent living. Additionally, assistive technology devices and training are available via the State Grant for Assistive Technology, offered through the Assistive Technology Resource Center in Hawaii.

To clarify, currently, DHS does not know how many residents would be served by this pilot program. We understand that this pilot program would serve those not eligible for our current services. Blind and visually impaired persons who are under the age of 55 and do not have an employment goal are not eligible for Ho`opono's vocational rehabilitation blindness training program. Persons 55 and above are eligible for Ho`opono's Independent Living Program for Older Individuals who are Blind (OIB). However, Ho`opono acknowledges that due to limited staff, eligible residents in rural communities may require our services. DHS views this pilot program as an opportunity to increase services and grow the workforce to serve these communities best.

In terms of developing the pilot program described in the measure and implementing it, DHS will require time and resources to convene the proposed neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program working group. DVR does not have staff to facilitate the work group as the Ho`opono program is experiencing a vacancy rate of approximately 30%. DVR would need sufficient general funds to contract services for a facilitator to convene the working group and pilot program planning effort; an appropriation will need to include travel costs. To expedite procurement, DVR would also request a procurement exemption. As the session continues, DVR will update the appropriation amount needed to facilitate the work

group and pilot program planning process. Additionally, DVR requests an exemption from Part I of Chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes, to further expedite the work group's work.

Additionally, DVR requests an extended effective date of the pilot program to be a minimum of six months to a year from the passage of this measure.

Further, DHS, in consultation with the working group, will need to address the minimum qualifications that the blind and visually impaired community expects to deliver the services described in the measure. DHS wants to ensure that the quality of services delivered by volunteers will meet the residents' needs and further their independence.

In addition to training, DHS will require all volunteers to meet standard background and criminal records checks required of Ho'opono staff to ensure pilot program participants' safety.

DHS has concerns with the measure's language in Section 2 (f), which states: "The department shall enter into a contract with a non-profit organization to recruit, train, and supervise volunteer service corps members and to oversee the pilot program, provided that existing department personnel may be assigned to fulfill administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the pilot program." As mentioned above, DHS needs time to work with the community to determine the scope of the pilot program and develop an appropriate budget; we do not believe that the current appropriation of \$25,000 will be sufficient to implement the pilot, though it may be part of the initial appropriation needed to fund the work of the working group.

Also, as the pilot program comes to fruition, DHS will need at least one 100% general funded Full-Time planner level position to oversee the contract and pilot program.

Lastly, we suggest that the pilot program last at least five years to give DHS and the community enough time to develop, implement, and evaluate the program.

DHS respectfully requests that any funds appropriated according to this proposed legislation be in addition to and shall not reduce or supplant any portion of the base budget for any state or county agency providing services for blind or visually impaired persons.

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

Testimony of James Gashel  
Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii  
Committee on Finance (FIN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023  
February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870 H.D.1 as approved by the Human Services committee. Mahalo to Representative Gregg Takayama and the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward this year.

This is an important bill for anyone who is blind or anyone who becomes blind while living on our neighbor islands. Added to not seeing, Isolation is a major barrier. Most services for the blind are provided through the state's Ho'oponono facility here on Oahu and not readily available to neighbor island residents unable to relocate to Oahu for several months. The best help with independence and self-sufficiency is tied to a job goal; fine if you are 25 but not so fine if you are 75. We should do better by our neighbor island residents.

As found in last year's committee report, SB2437\_SD1\_SSCR2088, "...approximately two thousand neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired do not have access to or are ineligible for existing state and local support services, including training, adjustments to blindness services, and transportation. The Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program to be established pursuant to this measure will supplement existing statewide services and enable these individuals to receive the necessary training and other services that would enable them to have full and integrated lives in their existing communities."

Unlike the bill last year, which did not pass, the bill this year proposes a one-year planning period led by the Department of Human Services with participation of stakeholders who live on the neighbor islands. This planning effort should be funded in the amount of \$25,000, provided to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ho'oponono Services for the Blind Division.

Enactment of HB870 H.D.1 will 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 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.

**HB-870-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 7:47:00 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 11:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tabatha Mitchell	National Organization of Parents of Blind Children	Support	In Person

Comments:

I am a parent of a blind child on Oahu, and I am here to ask you to support HB870. I serve on the Board of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, and in that service to my community, I support parents of blind kids throughout the nation & throughout all of the islands of Hawaii.

Blindness and low vision have no boundaries.

It is crucial that we establish & continue to develop programs to support blind people throughout all of the Hawaiian islands.

As a parent that has lived the reality of raising a child that happens to be blind, I can attest to the constant barriers that exist for blind people in our sighted world. Furthermore, I can attest to the extreme isolation that blindness presents.

This bill will help us break those barriers and support our blind and low vision citizens throughout all of Hawaii. Please support HB870. It is much needed; and quite frankly, very overdue.

**HB-870-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 12:15:21 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 11:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Lynn Murakami Akatsuka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I strongly support the passage of HB 870, HD 1. Please pass this bill to give hope, outreach and training services to our neighbor island blind and visually impaired residents through this pilot program.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB870, HD 1.

**HB-870-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/22/2023 4:08:41 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 11:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Clifford Miyashiro	Hoopono	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Enactment of HB870 H.D.1 will 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 peers who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed.

Enactment of HB870 H.D.1 will 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 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.

Brandon Young

2/22/2023

Committee on Finance (FIN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023  
February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Dear Chair and other committee members,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am submitting testimony in support of HB 870 HD 1. This bill is very important to the blind and visually impaired of Hawaii. This bill would help those who live on the neighbor islands and need services from the rehabilitation system in order to live independently.

This bill would provide a charter program to have blind and visually volunteers to visit the neighbor islands to provide services to those who are lacking services on the neighbor islands. Currently, people on the neighbor islands have to come to Oahu to receive services at the Ho`opono Services for the Blind Branch. This requires leaving their home for several months. This program would provide for volunteers who are blind and are willing to give of their skills and talents to travel to the neighbor islands to provide services. This bill is very important to me and I ask that you pass it along. I want to thank you and your committee for taking the time in reviewing our bill and scheduling it for this hearing. I hope you have a wonderful day.



**HB-870-HD-1**

Submitted on: 2/23/2023 8:25:39 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/24/2023 11:30:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. Thank you for taking the time to consider this bill. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, a blind high school student in Hawai'i, and I strongly support HB870.

I am lucky to live on O'ahu, the home of Ho'opono, which provides many of the services blind people need. These services, such as orientation and mobility training as well as other blindness skills training, are critical to the wellbeing of blind people. This bill aims to supplement the training provided at Ho'opono, so all blind Hawai'i residents have access to the services they need to be successful. Any resident could lose their sight at any time, and many are blind right now. The services facilitated by this bill will insure all Hawai'i residents, whether or not they live on O'ahu, get the services they need to be an active member of their community and the workforce.

Your support of this bill will potentially improve the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of blind people across Hawaii. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB870.

Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Testimony of Hoku Burrows

Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Hoku burrows, a proud member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in full support of HB870 H.D.1.

I am a blind woman originally from Molokai, relocating to Oahu to support myself with resources including important independent peer mentoring, public transportation enabling me to fully participate in education, employment, volunteer and social activities rather than the life I had in a neighbor island, a blind woman in isolation. Now that I am in my 70's, it is more important for me to have public transportation to get to doctors, shopping, NFBH meetings for peer support, volunteer work I give my time to giving back to projects important to me, and so much more to stay healthy and full of living.

Too many of our blind and disabled peers living on any island except Oahu live that life I once had. With this bill, they could have peer mentoring and so many more essential resources so important to each of us as blind people, giving them opportunity without leaving their home island.

I stand in strong support of the testimony submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa for seriously considering and supporting this bill's passing.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870 H.D.1.

As a local businessman and the president of the NFB of Hawai'i, I travel to our neighbor islands. Both for business and representing the NFB of Hawai'i, to support other blind individuals through mentoring, recommendations of local resources, offering choices of opportunities for good training, hope for a quality independent life and more. Transportation, blind training, local resources are lacking in our neighbor islands, the most of which are in Oahu or elsewhere in our country.

Personally, I have had the opportunity for good training and while visiting our neighbor islands, end up relying on costly transportation when participating in business or NFBH meetings, yet currently I am successfully employed, most blind people especially on the neighbor islands do not have that choice or opportunity for good blindness training, education, or employment that can afford taxi's or rideshare transportation. Without good training, rural life is extremely isolating and fraught with limitations inaccessible to the blind not needed with opportunity of good blindness training. Isolation and ultimately a lack of confidence, even depression, for no reason other than the lack of access to the community due to no blindness skills training, or transportation from home to resources in their community.

HB870 H.D.1 is a long overdue support needed to augment and aid in the services to our neighbor island blind and low vision peers.

I stand in strong support of the testimony submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for considering and supporting this bill's passing.

Testimony of Katie Keim

Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Katie Keim, a member and leader in the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in support of HB870 H.D.1.

At one time in my career with DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I had a caseload on Oahu, yet with no instructors on our neighbor islands, was sent to our neighbor islands to work with older individuals who are blind in their homes. First off, as a blind individual myself, transportation to the consumers' homes, was accomplished by hiring an individual to drive. This is the most cost and time effective way for a professional blind person to serve clients, yet during my off hours, I was isolated to my hotel.

Think of the blind older individuals I served, they were isolated the majority of their life unlike me, I could fly home to Oahu, which has good public transportation and services. Additionally, I could only visit every few months, only for a few hours, offering what I could during that limited time. Teaching cane travel instruction, personal independent living skills, like cooking cleaning and more, mentoring so needed to build confidence and give hope for a quality life, so desperately needed as blind people.

HB870 H.D.1 is a long overdue addition to our limited resources offered by our state programs for the blind and low vision.

I stand in strong support of the testimony submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for considering and supporting this important bill passing for my neighbor island peers.

Email: cylonone@aol.com

Testimony of Donald Sakamoto  
Member, National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii  
Committee on Finance (FIN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023  
February 24, 2023, 11:30 AM, hearing on HB870 H.D.1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in full support of HB870 H.D.1.

This is a very important bill for those who are blind or anyone who becomes blind while living on our neighbor islands. A lot of these individuals who experience not being able in seeing, and being isolated is truly a big problem.

Some of the services for the blind are provided through the state's Ho'opono facility located here on our island of Oahu however, not quite readily available to our neighbor island residents who are unable to relocate to Oahu for some several months or longer. This bill means hope for better opportunities to enable blind and visually impaired people to improve their lives.

The bill truly acknowledges the need for a supplemental services program for blind and visually impaired people who are neighbor island residents who are seeking the best help with their independence and eventually towards employment, etc. The time is to prepare to have better services for our neighbor island residents. Famous "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" by Benjamin

Franklin.

I truly urge you all to "Go For Broke" and please support to move this bill forward into law.