

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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FEBRUARY 3, 2021

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Senate Bill 1141 – Relating to Hearing and Vision Program

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 1141 that amends the hearing and vision program statute to increase the early identification of children with hearing or vision loss, by establishing consistent protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up, screener training, and data collection for quality improvement..

The sooner a parent is aware that their child has been identified as blind, deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing, the more advantageous it is for the child. The period from birth to 2 is a critical time for all children to acquire language and cognition. During this period, blind, deaf, deaf-blind, or hard of hearing children are often deprived of processes that promote healthy language development. Early identification presents opportunities for the family and professionals serving that family to ensure appropriate cultural and linguistic support for the child's development. This bill will increase the early identification of children with hearing or vision loss by establishing consistent protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up, screener training, and data collection and reporting.

We strongly urge that you move this bill forward.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director



Hawaii
Children's Action Network Speaks!
Building a unified voice for Hawaii's children

Hawai'i Children's Action Network Speaks! is a nonpartisan 501c4 nonprofit committed to advocating for children and their families. Our core issues are safety, health, and education.

To: Senator Keohokalole, Chair
Senator Baker, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Health

Re: **SB 1141- Relating to Hearing and Vision Programs**
1:05 PM, February 3, 2021

Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker, and committee members,

On behalf of HCAN Speaks!, thank you for the opportunity to testify in **support of Senate Bill 1141**, relating to hearing and vision program.

Early identification of hearing loss is important to ensure children and their caregivers are provided the supports and care they need. Hearing loss can occur throughout childhood and therefore, it is critical that screenings are on-going and that there are established evidence-based practices for the medical providers and personnel administering the screenings. Senate Bill 1141 requires the Department of Health to set recommended standards for training, certifications, and qualifications of personnel who conduct hearing and vision screening and it also allows the Department to set standards for ages or grades of screenings, ensuring consistent practice for all children across the state.

Establishing protocols for hearing and visions screening and follow-up and screener training will strengthen the state's on-going work. It will also help make the system more equitable for all children. In the study, *Missed Opportunities: Do States Require Screening of Children for Health Conditions that Interfere with Learning*¹, children most likely to be impacted by health barriers to learning (which include vision problems and hearing loss) are those living in poverty². Additionally, data collection and reporting is necessary to understanding if current systems of practice are meeting their goals.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bill 1141.

Kathleen Algire
Director of Early Learning and Health Policy

¹ Gracy, D., Fabian, A., Basch, C. H., Scigliano, M., MacLean, S. A., MacKenzie, R. K., & Redlener, I. E. (2018). Missed opportunities: Do states require screening of children for health conditions that interfere with learning?. *PloS one*, 13(1), e0190254. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0190254>

² Delaney Gracy, Anupa Fabian, Virginia Roncaglione, Katie Savage and Irwin Redlener, *Health Barriers to Learning: The Prevalence and Educational Consequences in Disadvantaged Children* (Children's Health Fund, 2016)

Testimony in favor of S.B. 1141

Senator Jarrett Keohokalole, Chair
Senator Rosalyn H. Baker, Vice Chair

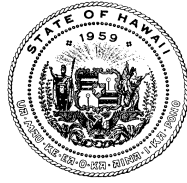
Dear Chair Keohokalole, Vice Chair Baker and members of the Senate Health Committee:

It is my pleasure to submit testimony on behalf of the members of the Hawaii Optometric Association, in favor of S.B. 1141. Vision plays an important role in children learning, it is imperative that a comprehensive eye exam is performed on a child as early as possible. Many diseases of the eye can be diagnosed and corrected if found early, a comprehensive eye exam is critical in a correct diagnosis.

A child with a vision problem finds it difficult to do well academically in school and is sometimes put in a class for the learning disabled. The child does not recognize that he or she has a vision problem because they have always had it and have no idea that others do not see things as they do. Proper diagnosis and corrective procedures are critical and exams should be conducted by a licensed doctor of the eyes either an Ophthalmologist or an Optometrist. We believe that it would be financially beneficial to the State of Hawaii if a child has a vision exam prior to entering school, including preschool and most importantly the child would benefit. Children with an undetected vision problem can suffer from the stigma of being different than their classmates and this can have a negative impact on their academic and social well-being.

With well established guide lines and consistent protocols S.B. 1141 can be the catalyst for addressing the importance of good vision.

Charlotte Nekota
Executive Director
Hawaii Optometric Association



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Testimony in SUPPORT of S.B. 1141
RELATING TO HEARING AND VISION PROGRAM

SENATOR JARRETT KEOHOKALOOLE, CHAIR
SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH

Hearing Date: 2/3/2021

Room Number: Via Videoconference

1 **Fiscal Implications:** There are no fiscal implications to the Department of Health (DOH).

2 **Department Testimony:** The Department **strongly supports** this measure, which is part of the
3 Governor's Administrative Package, to amend Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS) §321-101 to
4 establish recommended standards for hearing and vision screening and follow-up, screener
5 training, and data collection and reporting.

6 The DOH recognizes that the early identification of hearing and vision loss, with appropriate
7 follow-up services, is essential for the development of children's language and communication
8 skills needed for learning in school.

9 HRS §321-101 mandates a hearing and vision program for school children to be conducted by
10 the DOH. This program was discontinued in 1995 due to budget reductions and with the
11 assumption that primary care providers will do the hearing and vision screening. The DOH does
12 not have the funding or staff resources to reinstate this program. Currently, a DOH audiologist
13 provides training and consultation to community organizations on hearing and vision screening
14 protocols and tools.

15 Improvement in hearing and vision screening for children is needed. Providers and community
16 programs vary in their protocols and training for screenings and follow-up. Screeners vary in
17 their training and skills for conducting screenings. Hawaii data from the National Survey of
18 Children's Health show that, compared with other states, Hawaii ranks low in rate of vision

1 screening of 61.6% (35th of 50 states for all ages of children). Although newborns receive
2 hearing screening, there is a need to identify children who develop hearing loss after the newborn
3 period due to late onset or progressive hearing loss.

4 The proposed amendment to HRS §321-101 will allow the Department to set recommended
5 standards based on national guidelines and best practices for hearing and vision screening and
6 follow-up, screener training, and data collection for quality improvement. A statewide screening
7 protocol will ensure that all organizations performing screening are using tools, screening
8 procedures, and referral criteria based on evidence and best practice.

9 The DOH will use existing staff to support the proposed Hearing and Vision Program. The DOH
10 will convene an advisory committee with professional, state, and community members to assist
11 the DOH in developing recommended protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up,
12 screener training, and data collection and reporting. Training will be provided at no cost to the
13 community organizations.

14 Thank you for the opportunity to testify on this bill.