

National FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF HAWAII
Testimony before the HMS/EDU committees
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, testifying to support SCR1 and SR5.

Before getting to the details, the members of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii want to say thanks to Senator San Buenaventura and the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing these resolutions forward. Your understanding and support affirm the abilities of qualified blind people, which we appreciate.

SCR1 and SR5 urge 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 point of these resolutions is to emphasize the importance of having teachers who can serve as role models. That it’s good to have blind adult role models for young blind students should be obvious.

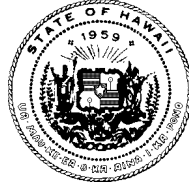
Who better to teach a blind person to go safely from point A to point B than someone who does this all the time as a blind person? Who better to teach reading and writing in Braille than teachers who read Braille with their fingers, not with their eyes? These resolutions recognize the advantages of having blind teachers to teach these skills unique to blindness. The legislature understands the advantages blind teachers can bring to blind students. Resolutions with an identical purpose passed the Senate and the House last year, but the clock ran out on the concurrent resolutions in both bodies.

As summarized from the Senate report of the HMS/EDU committees: The Department of Education (DOE) has not employed individuals who hold the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) credential and until recently would only accept the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. The COMS certification gives DOE personnel to provide vision-centered orientation and mobility services but not personnel qualified or able to teach the approach called “Structured Discovery,” which has widely recognized benefits for teaching safe self-movement skills to blind students and is generally accepted in the United States. Of these two recognized training methods, adherents to the structured discovery approach emphasize employing blind instructors, while adherents to the vision-centered approach emphasize instructors who can see, resulting in diminished employment opportunities at DOE for qualified blind persons. This measure urges DOE to develop and implement a program to recruit and employ qualified blind professionals to provide more opportunities for blind instructors in the workforce while providing opportunities for self-improvement to vision impaired students (refer to report SCR6_SSCR1368, thirty-first legislature, regular session of 2021).

It should also be noted that the blind adult training program, called “New Visions,” operated by the Ho’opono Services for the Blind branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Human Services, is and has been a certified structured discovery training center for many years. As such, Ho’opono employs certified NOMC blind orientation and mobility instructors. This resolution, urging DOE to employ certified blind instructors, would harmonize and better align the state’s mobility training services for children and youth with its very successful adult training program.

Members of the NFB of Hawaii are blind people. We stand ready and willing to work with the Department of Education to implement these resolutions, hoping the concurrent versions cross the finish line this year. Mahalo for your support.

DAVID Y. IGE
GOVERNOR



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR

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

March 22, 2022

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Human Services

The Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SCR 1/ SR 5 – 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: March 31, 2022, 3:10 p.m.
Via Videoconference

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

PURPOSE: The purpose of the resolution is to encourage the Department of Education (DOE) to develop and implement an affirmative action program, to the extent permitted by law, 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 staffed by a team of professionals, many of whom are blind themselves. 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. The program 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.

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.

The Department welcomes opportunities to collaborate with the DOE to develop a pathway for DVR-trained and qualified applicants to fill DOE positions who can provide blindness skills training and support to DOE students.

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



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
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March 31, 2022

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON HUMAN SERVICES AND ON EDUCATION

Senate Concurrent Resolution 1 / Senate Resolution 5 –
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 Senate Concurrent Resolution 1 and Senate Resolution 5. If the Department of Education adopts this practice, not only would it affirm an employment first philosophy, but it would provide a powerful example to the affected students with disabilities by letting them know that their disability need not be a barrier when it comes to employment.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

SCR-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2022 5:05:11 PM

Testimony for HMS on 3/31/2022 3:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stan Young	Testifying for Hawaii State committee of Blind Vendors	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Stan Young, Chair of the Hawaii State Committee of Blind Vendors

Before the HMS/EDU committees

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022

March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am Stan Young, supporting SCR1 and SR5.

As a blind person with many associations with blind students, I believe that these resolutions will greatly enhance the education of blind students. and their futures. These resolutions support the fact that qualified blind people can teach blind students and have advantages in serving as role models. That it's good to have blind adult role models for young blind students should be obvious. Who better to teach a blind person to go safely from point A to point B than someone who does this all the time as a blind person? Who better to teach reading and writing in Braille than teachers who read Braille with their fingers, not with their eyes? These resolutions recognize the advantages of having blind teachers to teach these skills unique to blindness.

Testimony of Donald Sakamoto Before the HMS/EDU committees Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022 March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on
SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon, Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, fully supporting SCR1 and SR5.

These two resolutions ,mainly support the fact that qualified blind people can teach blind students and have advantages in serving as role models. What better way to have blind adult role models who have learned the true aspects to teach other blind persons to travel safely from any destination as well as the skills in reading and writing in Braille than those teachers who read Braille with their fingers not by those teachers who read using with their eyes. These two resolutions do recognize the importance of having blind teachers to teach these skills for individuals experiencing blindness.

A good example is the blind adult training program at Ho`opono, called “New Visions,” that is provided by the Services for the Blind branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Human Services (DOH), is a certified structured discovery training center program. This center program employs certified blind orientation and mobility (NOMC) instructors. This resolution does mention, in urging the DOH to employ certified blind instructors, would greatly build up their state’s mobility training services for those children and youth with its proven successful adult training program.

As a blind person who has gone through the rigorous training program at Ho`opono and a 2011 graduate, I have seen firsthand experience of some adult graduate students who have taking their skills that they learned and pursued in entering in employment of teaching other blind individuals such as children, youths, and others.

The time is now to prepare and enact the state to develop and implement a program to recruit and employ certified blind professional teachers to provide more opportunities for blind teachers in the workforce while providing opportunities for self-improvement to vision impaired students. Famous “by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” by Benjamin Franklin.

Mahalo and for these reasons I have presented I highly urge you all to pass both of these resolutions to allow the state agencies to employ more blind certified people to teach other children, youths, and others the vital skills they need to be independent and successful in their lives.

Brandon G. Young

Testimony of Brandon Young
Before the HMS/EDU committees
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon, Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am Brandon Young, supporting SCR1 and SR5.

I am supporting this resolution because it is a great need here in the blindness community in Hawaii. Currently and historically, the Department of Education has not employed qualified blind teachers to teach either braille or Orientation and mobility skills. This resolution would strongly implore the Department of Education to hire certified blind instructors in Hawaii.

As blind instructors, we teach students using the structured discovery method. This method teaches skills based on learned confidence and the student's abilities to master the given skill. As blind instructors, we monitor our students non-visually. This means that we follow our students throughout the lesson. The current method that is used by sighted instructors is to monitor their students with their vision. As blind instructors, we give our students rigid canes. These canes are longer and help the students build confidence through having more time to react to obstacles. These canes also have a metal tip on them to help students develop skills in echolocation. The sounds that the metal tip can make can help the student to identify where buildings or doors are to enter a location. Currently, blind students are given bulky folding canes for their Orientation and Mobility lessons. These canes are shorter and are often heavier to use. The heavier cane results in the student getting tired quicker. These canes often do not have metal tips and do not give the students any auditory feedback. I would hope that you would strongly urge the Department of Education to hire qualified blind instructors. I urge you to pass this resolution. I want to thank you for your time and support in this matter.

SCR-1

Submitted on: 3/29/2022 10:38:43 PM

Testimony for HMS on 3/31/2022 3:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kimeona Kane	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Kākou,

I support this resolution to help our keiki.

Mahalo,

Kimeona Kane, Waimānalo

Testimony of Jaclyn Leilani Borsa
Before the HMS/EDU committees
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am Jaclyn Borsa, supporting SCR1 and SR5. I was diagnosed with my visual impairment when I was 8 years old. I hope any blind or visually impaired child gets the blindness skills training they need from someone who knows what they are going through. Someone who can teach them how to use techniques to get through school without their blindness being what holds them back because they have first hand knowledge of how to use blindness skills techniques to be successful.

These resolutions support the fact that qualified blind people can teach blind students and have advantages in serving as role models. That it's good to have blind adult role models for young blind students should be obvious. Who better to teach a blind person to go safely from point A to point B than someone who does this all the time as a blind person? Who better to teach reading and writing in Braille than teachers who read Braille with their fingers, not with their eyes? These resolutions recognize the advantages of having blind teachers to teach these skills unique to blindness.

The legislature understands the advantages blind teachers can bring to blind students. Resolutions with an identical purpose passed the Senate and the House last year, but the clock ran out on the concurrent resolutions in both bodies. According to the Senate report from last year's hearing: adherents to the structured discovery approach emphasize employing blind instructors, while adherents to the vision-centered approach emphasize instructors who can see, resulting in diminished employment opportunities at DOE for qualified blind persons. This measure urges DOE to develop and implement a program to recruit and employ qualified blind professionals to provide more opportunities for blind instructors in the workforce while providing opportunities for self-improvement to vision impaired students (refer to report SCR6_SSCR1368, thirty-first legislature, regular session of 2021).

The blind adult training program at Ho`opono, called "New Visions," provided by the Services for the Blind branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Human Services, is a certified structured discovery training center. Ho`opono employs certified NOMC blind orientation and mobility instructors. This resolution, urging DOE to employ certified blind instructors, would harmonize and better align the state's mobility training services for children and youth with its very successful adult training program.

Please help blind students and blind teachers by working to pass the concurrent resolution this year. Members of the NFB of Hawaii are blind people. We stand ready and willing to work with the Department of Education to implement these resolutions, hoping the concurrent versions cross the finish line this year. Mahalo for your support.

SCR-1

Submitted on: 3/30/2022 12:05:55 PM

Testimony for HMS on 3/31/2022 3:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tabatha Mitchell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Blind kids need teachers that are blind. What better person is there to teach a blind kid how to do the things they need to do. I am a sighted parent of a blind kid. I learned very early into this blindness process that I was not her best teacher. My daughter is the youngest of 5 kids. None of us can teach her as effectively as a blind person. Non- visual skills can not be simply obtained by quickly donning a blindfold or by closing your eyes. Non-visual skills go way beyond vision. And quite frankly, sighted people are not as tuned in to their other senses the way that another blind person is. I know this because I live it every single day. The BEST teachers for my daughter that happens to be blind are those individuals that are blind.

Testimony of Leni Ebisutani
Before the HMS/EDU committees
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5

Good afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am Leni Ebisutani, supporting SCR1 and SR5.

These are very important resolutions supporting the fact that qualified blind people can teach blind students and have advantages in serving as role models. It should be obvious that our school-age blind students can benefit by having blind teachers to identify with as role models. Who better to teach a blind person to go safely from point A to point B than someone who does this all the time as a blind person? Who better to teach reading and writing in Braille than teachers who read Braille with their fingers, not with their eyes? These resolutions recognize the advantages of having blind teachers to teach these skills unique to blindness.

Resolutions with an identical purpose passed the Senate and the House last year, but the clock ran out on the concurrent resolutions in both bodies. According to the Senate report from last year's hearing: adherents to the structured discovery approach emphasize employing blind instructors, while adherents to the vision-centered approach emphasize instructors who can see, resulting in diminished employment opportunities at DOE for qualified blind persons. This measure urges DOE to develop and implement a program to recruit and employ qualified blind professionals to provide more opportunities for blind instructors in the workforce while providing opportunities for self-improvement to vision impaired students (refer to report SCR6_SSCR1368, thirty-first legislature, regular session of 2021).

I am presently a student in the blind adult training program at Ho`opono, called "New Visions," provided by the Services for the Blind branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in the Department of Human Services. This is an excellent certified structured discovery training center. Ho`opono employs certified NOMC blind orientation and mobility instructors. This resolution, urging DOE to employ certified blind instructors, would harmonize and better align the state's mobility training services for children and youth with its very successful adult training program.

Please help blind students and blind teachers by working to pass the concurrent resolution this year. Members of the NFB of Hawaii are blind people. We stand ready and willing to work with the Department of Education to implement these resolutions, hoping the concurrent versions cross the finish line this year. Mahalo for your support.

**Testimony of Alice Talbott
Before the HMS/EDU committes
Hawaii State Senate
ThirtyFirst Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022 3:10 P.M. hearing on SCR1/SR5**

**Good Afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihura; Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim.
I am Alice Talbott and I support SCR1/SR5.**

When I became blind I was very active in multiple orginazations and traviled extensively. It was essential that I receive assistance if I was to continue functioning as a productive member of our community. I enrolled in the New Visions program at Hoopono and was inspired when I met blind instructors who were efficient and good at their jobs. They were enthusastic in encouraging me to learn how to navagate in “my” world without sight. I knew I could do it because they were doing it. I an a strong advocate of hiring compitant Blind instructors, office workers, etc. as role modles.

I strongly urge you to pass this resolution.

**Mahalo,
Alice Talbott**

Melissa Gerber Testimony
Testimony before the HMS/EDU committees
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-First Legislature, Regular Session of 2022
March 31, 2022, 3:10 PM, hearing on SCR1, SR5



Good afternoon Chair San Buenaventura, Vice Chair Ihara, Chair Kidani, and Vice Chair Kim. I am Melissa Gerber, representing the perspective of a blind individual, testifying to support SCR1 and SR5.

Not only am I blind, but in my profession, I help others that are blind gain and maintain employment. In my life it has given me great inspiration and confidence to learn blind skills from mentors who are blind. As a blind person there are fears I have which only another blind individual could understand. In my personal training, seeing a blind mobility instructor navigate their environment safely taught me I could do it too!

Supporting SCR1 and SR5 means supporting the idea that blind individuals can be just as skilled and just as safe as their non-blind counterparts. We need legislation that will stand up against the professional discrimination of blind instructors. Your support of this bill will grant the opportunity to blind instructors to be in the position to mentor, teach, and inspire blind people young and old. It will teach blind individuals to reach the same desired independence the instructor has achieved and all can achieve with proper training.

With much appreciation and thanks for your support.