

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.

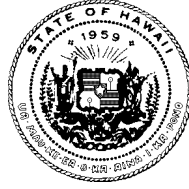
Who better to teach a blind person to go safely from point A to point B than someone who does this all the time as a blind person? Who better to teach reading and writing in Braille than teachers who read Braille with their fingers, not with their eyes? These resolutions recognize the advantages of having 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

March 30, 2022

Rep. Justin Woodson, *Chair*
House Committee on Education
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Rep. Sylvia Luke, *Chair*
House Committee on Finance
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Sen. Joy San Buenaventura, *Chair*
Senate Committee on Human Resources
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Sen. Michelle Kidani, *Chair*
Senate Committee on Education
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LATE

Re: SR 5-2022, SCR 1-2022, HCR 13-2022, and HR 11-2022

Dear Chairs Woodson, Luke, San Buenaventura, and Kidani:

The Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Education Professionals (ACVREP) writes regarding SR 5-2022, SCR 1-2022, HCR 13-2022, and HR 11-2022. We appreciate that the resolutions aim to increase the employment of qualified blind instructors in Department of Education programs. However, we respectfully propose amendments to the resolutions to remove incorrect characterizations of Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS) credentialing.

ACVREP is a nonprofit organization established to assist in improving quality of life, public health, and the safety of individuals who are blind or visually impaired. Its mission is to advance professional competency so all people who are blind or low vision receive services from highly qualified professionals. To advance this mission, ACVREP offers professional certification for vision rehabilitation and education professionals that meet rigorous recognized best practices standards. Programs are designed to offer certificants the means to demonstrate knowledge, skills, and professionalism. ACVREP offers certification in four disciplines: Orientation & Mobility (COMS), Vision Rehabilitation Therapy (CVRT), Low Vision Therapy (CLVT), and Assistive Technology Instruction for People with Visual Impairment (CATIS).

ACVREP supports the goal of SR 5-2022, SCR 1-2022, HCR 13-2022, and HR 11-2022 to increase the employment of blind instructors in the Department of Education through development and implementation of an affirmative action program. ACVREP does not object to the Hawaii Teachers Standards Board's acceptance of employment of National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) credentialed professionals to teach matters of orientation and mobility to blind students. **ACVREP, however, urges the legislature to amend the resolutions to correct its mischaracterization of COMS.**

The resolutions misleadingly assert that "the COMS certification focuses on vision-centered orientation and mobility services, but does not focus on the structured discovery approach." COMS professionals use a variety of instructional strategies appropriate to client needs and lesson goals. COMS professionals engage in a comprehensive approach to orientation and mobility addressing nonvisual, visual, physical, cognitive, and psycho-social aspects related to mobility training for individuals of all ages, as well as diverse needs and abilities.

COMS professionals are educated in a range of instructional techniques and how to recognize which approach is best suited to a particular learner. These techniques include, but are not limited to, inquiry-based learning, expeditionary learning, differentiated instruction, and direct instruction. The COMS certification recognizes that there is no single instructional strategy that would be best for everyone. COMS professionals teach skills to meet the current and future orientation and mobility needs of their clients, accounting for each client's goals, travel environments, and visual prognoses. They use a guided exploration and problem-solving approach that is customized to the goals and skills of each learner. Methods and strategies include the use of non-visual techniques (auditory and tactual) and visual techniques including the optimization of reliable remaining vision. Strategies and problem-solving skills are taught with the goal to develop independent travelers with a high level of self-confidence.

In practice, there is little difference between COMS and NOMC methods.

Further, the resolutions mistakenly assert that "the vision-centered orientation and mobility approach emphasizes the employment of non-blind instructors." On the contrary, COMS professionals are blind, partially sighted, and sighted. ACVREP has certified many blind COMS professionals, including a current blind COMS certificant who is a member of the ACVREP Board of Directors

To correct these mischaracterizations, ACVREP proposes that the following language be stricken from the resolutions:

WHEREAS, the COMS certification focuses on vision-centered orientation and mobility services, but does not focus on the structured discovery approach; and

WHEREAS, the structured discovery approach emphasizes the employment of blind instructors, whereas the vision-centered orientation and mobility approach emphasizes the employment of non-blind instructors, resulting in diminished employment opportunities for qualified blind persons as instructors in Department of Education programs; and

Thank you for your consideration of these amendments. If you have any questions regarding this letter, please feel free to reach out to ACVREP using the contact information identified below.

Sincerely,



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President/CEO
ACVREP
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SR-5

Submitted on: 3/30/2022 11:53:34 AM

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:

I watched this very real need in action at Pearl Harbor as my daughter, Emerie & I participated with a group of blind adults that were assembled to improve the Pearl Harbor experience for blind patrons.

I did very very little sighted guide with my daughter Emerie throughout the day. She is 15 and has been using a NFB long white cane since she was 3. She has received training on lots of O&M methods over the years in various states. However, her most rigorous training occurs daily from me & her family. We use Structured Discovery methods that we learned from seminars and books and most importantly, from blind role models.

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. The reality is that I know where & when Emerie has had what training and I know what certifications her trainers have had. I am a sighted parent raising a 15 year old blind daughter among 5 sighted children. Every person in our family can see the difference in her skills and capabilities when she is mixed in with any group of blind kids & adults.

Eme simply moves more independently.

As a mother, I know that is because she has been trained with Structured Discovery methods since diagnosed as blind at 3. I wish I could explain how just 2 weeks of immersive training with blind cane instructors 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 independence and walking around city streets with no vision is not taken lightly by any parent of a blind kid. 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.

We've seen a lot of methods of teaching O&M to blind kids, and as parents, we have selected to employ Structured Discovery within our family because it works. And there is no better teacher than a person that is blind.

Testimony of Katie Keim 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. My name is Katie Keim, a blind business woman and member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, in full support of SCR1 and SR5.

Today I successfully have a career for over 25 years of my 27 years of blindness, full time work using braille daily, travel independently using my long white cane, when I want, where I want, with confidence, and no hesitation, due to the excellent instruction I received from qualified blind teachers and their example and mentoring. It inspired me toward a lifetime commitment to ensure the same quality opportunity for other blind people regardless of their age, especially our blind children.

Early in my career as a qualified blind instructor, I worked in a limited capacity as a consultant for DOE and then full time for 11 years in DHS, toward the success of a number of young students' lives being changed by my instruction and example.

At the time I became a DHS employee, I was able to make strides in our work during summer programs with our youth in DOE, but not those younger than 14, during some of the most critical child's development and learning years with daily habits being developed.

Many of my qualified blind colleagues have the required education and NOMC certification needed to be instructors in DOE, yet those who have tried to apply have yet to even be acknowledged, whether the lack of an accessible application submission process, or often due to their NOMC certification. The legislation recognizes in CR6_SSCR1368, thirty-first legislature, regular session of 2021) the need, yet time ran out for the concurrent session and vote.

It is time to move these resolutions forward and complete the process for the benefit of our blind DOE children, and give employment opportunity to qualified blind NOMC instructors who have invested their time and energy in their education to achieve their own dream of structured discovery teaching to our blind children so they too can learn to aspire and ultimately achieve their own dreams in the future.

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.

I stand in full support of the testimony submitted by James Gashel for the NFB of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for your consideration and support.

Testimony of Hoku Burrows 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. My name is Hoku Burrows, a blind woman and member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, supporting SCR1 and SR5.

I have experienced in my own life the benefit of qualified blind people teaching me, a blind individual and the advantage of blind instructors and mentors as my role models.

Of the young blind students I spend time with, it's good to have blind adult role models for young blind students and is obvious the importance it makes in their lives. I stand in full support of the testimony submitted by James Gashel for the NFB of Hawai'i.

Please help blind students and blind teachers by working to pass the concurrent resolution this year. Mahalo nui loa for your support.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett 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. My name is Virgil Stinnett, a blind businessman and President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, supporting SCR1 and SR5.

I am a successful blind entrepreneur and world traveler today because of excellent training by blind NOMC certified instructors. At one time I undertook the education to become a certified NOMC instructor to use toward the enrichment of blind students. During my 5 years of NOMC certification, a number of young students lives were impacted with positive results with my instruction and example as a blind man. Unfortunately I was not able to make the same impact on our young DOE students, unless they participated in summer programs offered at DHS Ho'opono. The summer programs are a very limited exposure for young students and not until they are at least 14 years old. By then a lot of time lost has gone by in their daily and early learning. A summer program is not enough time in their young lives to give them the full benefit of their K=12 years exposure to qualified blind instructors in their daily education of essential blind tools for their success later in life as a contributing working adult.

The 2 resolutions support the fact that qualified blind people can teach blind students and have advantages in serving as role models.

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).

I stand in full support of the testimony submitted by James Gashel for the NFB of Hawai'i.

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 and Aloha for listening to our testimony and for your support.

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.

SR-5

Submitted on: 3/30/2022 2:51:47 PM

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

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stacie Fong	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of (insert your name here)

Before the HMS/EDU committees

Hawaii State Senate

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

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.