

DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • TTY (808) 586-8162 • Fax (808) 586-8129

LATE

February 8, 2023

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senate Bill 614 – Relating to the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 614 – Relating to the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program. This bill would require the Department of Human Services to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide training and other services to blind residents residing on the neighbor islands.

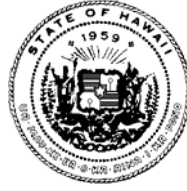
Equivalent programs and services are not available on the neighbor islands. The pilot program would establish a working group composed of neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired to provide recommendations regarding the establishment and implementation of training and services pilot program. Providing training, services and support to individuals who are blind and visually impaired on their respective island will improve their quality of life and independence.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

February 6, 2023

TO: The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 614 – RELATING TO THE NEIGHBOR ISLANDS BLIND AND VISUALLY
IMPAIRED SERVICE PILOT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: Wednesday, February 8, 2023, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill and provides comments.

PURPOSE: The purpose of the bill is to require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish and fund a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program and working group that supplements existing statewide services by providing training and other services to neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired.

DHS appreciates the opportunity to participate in a working group with the goal of supplementing necessary services for neighbor island residents who are blind and visually impaired.

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. A number of the 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 here in Hawaii.

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." First, DHS currently does not have sufficient staff available to perform such a function for the proposed pilot program.

Second, if the measure passes, the department will need new positions and a general fund appropriation to perform these additional duties and maintain current responsibilities. Additionally, the federal funding requirements of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services for Older Blind grants would prevent DHS staff from working on services provided to individuals who are not eligible for our programs. Consequently, the proposed measure requires new 100% state general funded positions. The number of positions would need to be researched through departmental consultation with the working group.

DHS appreciates that any funds appropriated according to this proposed legislation shall 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.

SB-614

Submitted on: 2/6/2023 9:53:37 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/8/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Stan Young	Testifying for Hawaii State committee of Blind Vendors	Support	In Person

Comments:

It's clear that only an extremely low percentage of the outer island blind are getting access to services, training, and support in order to be ready to function in society, as well as obtain employment. This results in low competency and employment for the blind on the outer islands. Although there might be a short term, or temporary, training from Hoopono on Oahu, it doesn't fulfil the need for a longer term, comprehensive program that will enable the blind to be independent functioning members of society.

Testimony of James Gashel
Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii
Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023
February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting SB614. Much mahalo to Senator San Buenaventura who also chairs our 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'oponopono 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."

At its core this bill acknowledges the need for a supplemental services program for blind and visually impaired people who are neighbor island residents. The services authorized would not replace training at Ho'oponopono; quite the opposite. More than anything else, this bill would give neighbor island residents a pathway out of isolation. This bill means hope for better opportunities to enable blind and visually impaired people to improve their lives.

The bill includes a detailed list of services described as pier to pier outreach, sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, and mobility training. Nine specific services are authorized as follows:

- (1) Outreach efforts to identify individual and program needs;
- (2) Coordination with existing programs to ensure that existing services are identified and used to the maximum extent possible;
- (3) Adjustment services, including individual and group counseling;
- (4) Access to and training to use telecommunications services to receive current news, weather alerts, and other vital public information;
- (5) Awareness development and training for use of computers, smart phones, and other communications devices;

- (6) Daily living, self-care, and home management skills;
- (7) Orientation and mobility training;
- (8) Advocacy training and assistance to secure needed benefits, services, and individual rights; and
- (9) Other services, including peer support needed for program participants to sustain independence and social integration.

Support for transportation, referred to as "special needs transportation," would also be provided. This section recognizes the serious limitations faced by blind and visually impaired people who are unable to drive but live in areas where having access to and use of a vehicle is a necessity since public transportation is infrequent or often not available at all. nonetheless, support for special needs transportation is intended to supplement and not replace any public transportation services available.

Regarding the nine services listed as outreach and training, the advantage of peer support provided by qualified volunteers is fundamental to this bill. Think of it as blind people helping other blind people. Who could be more motivated to help others than those of us who have had the advantages which come from excellent training and services? We are the Aloha state. When this bill is passed blind people will have the opportunity to reach out and teach other blind people, expressing the aloha spirit with our peers on the neighbor islands. Please help us to use our skills in service to the state and to our fellow blind people in need within our state.

About implementation, SB614 will give the Department of Human Services a \$25,000 appropriation to be used for planning with affected neighbor island residents. This would be a planning grant, with further decisions to be made by the Department, community members, and the legislature.

Enactment of SB614 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.

SB-614

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 12:40:01 PM

Testimony for HHS on 2/8/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tabatha Mitchell	Testifying for National Organization of Parents of Blind Children	Support	In Person

Comments:

Aloha committee members,

I am a parent of a blind child on Oahu. I serve on the Board of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children. It is an organization that gave so much to me and my family in our darkest hour of need when we were trying to learn how to simply parent our child that was identified as blind from a rare genetic disorder.

In this position, I work with parents around the nation. Over the years I have worked with parents distributed throughout the Hawaiian islands. Blindness and low vision have no boundaries. It is crucial that we find and develop our outreach programs to identify & support these parents and their blind & low vision children.

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 must be overcome that are put in place by tradition and simple gross oversight. As a parent of 5 children total, I can also attest that a general lack of people understanding the capability of blind people & the training & tools needed to achieve independence is a very large part of our problem as a society.

This bill will help us break those barriers and support our blind and low vision citizens of Hawaii in all of our beautiful islands. Please support SB614. It is much needed and frankly, very overdue.

Mahalo,

Tabatha Mitchell

NOPBC

Hawaii representative

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in support of SB614.

We want to give a big Mahalo to Senator San Buenaventura who chairs our Deaf and Blind Task Force, for supporting this bill moving forward this session.

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 end up relying on costly transportation when participating in business or NFBH meetings on our neighbor islands, 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 limiting 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.

SB614 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.

SB-614

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 11:19:31 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/8/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clifford Miyashiro	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony of Clifford Miyashiro
Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023
February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Clifford Miyashiro, testifying to support SB614.

This is a bill to help our fellow blind people who live on the neighbor islands in our state. I live here on Oahu and operate a vending facility right up the street from the state capitol. I am very fortunate to have this opportunity.

Most blind people, especially when they become blind later in life, it's hard to go places when transportation is so hard to get as in most parts of the neighbor islands. Isolation is a serious problem.

SB614 won't solve all the problems for our neighbor islands blind, but it will help to make a beginning. It won't be perfect, but better to do something rather than almost nothing, which is basically the situation right now.

Please pass SB614 to give hope to our neighbor islands blind residents. Mahalo for your consideration of their needs.

Testimony of Katie Keim

Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Katie Keim, a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in support of SB614.

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.

SB614 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, SB614's passing for my neighbor island peers.

SB-614

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 11:04:27 AM

Testimony for HHS on 2/8/2023 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon 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 Hawaii, and I strongly support SB614.

I am lucky to live on Oahu, where the transportation and other services are generally adequate. As a blind person, I can't drive, which is why I'm learning how to ride the bus. The bus insures I can travel independently at a lower cost. After I leave home, I will no longer have my parents to drive me to where I need to go, so will completely or almost completely rely on the public transportation system to travel distances I can't feasibly walk.

I have the same need as blind citizens living on the neighbor islands, where public transportation may be inadequate in some areas. The passage of this bill will help to meet this need for every blind person in Hawaii, even if they live on the other islands. It is critical blind people have access to public transportation so we can get to school, work, family, and other obligations along with anywhere else we need or want to go.

Also on Oahu is Ho'opono, where much of the other services for blind people are provided through. 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 Hawaii residents have access to the services they need to be successful.

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 this SB614.

Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Brandon Young

2/5/2023

Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)
Hawaii State Senate
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023
February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Dear Chair Joy San Buenaventura and other committee members,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I am submitting testimony in support of SB 614. This bill would help to provide services to blind persons on the neighbor islands. I would hope that you and your committee consider this bill for passage.

The bill that I am testifying on would provide rehabilitation services for the blind and visually impaired on the neighbor islands. Currently, blind people on the neighbor islands do not get rehabilitation services at their homes. Most people must travel to Oahu to receive rehabilitation services from the New Visions program at Ho`opono Services for the Blind branch. As blind people who have received rehabilitation training ourselves, we would be willing to provide members of the National Federation of the Blind and other organizations to provide these services that are currently not available for these people that live outside of Oahu. We would work with the current Vocational Rehabilitation system to fill in the gap that is not being provided at this moment.

I want to relet you know that rehabilitation services are very important for blind people to live independent lives. This bill would help the many blind people on outer islands that are currently not getting services to help them live independently. Thank you for taking the time to hear and consider our bill. I again would recommend that you pass this bill. Thank you again and I hope you have a great day.

Testimony of Hoku Burrows

Committee on Health and Human Services (HHS)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 8, 2023, 1:00 PM, hearing on SB614

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Hoku burrows, a proud member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in support of SB614.

Mahalo nui loa to Senator San Buenaventura who chairs our Deaf and Blind Task Force, in supporting this bill moving forward this session.

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 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.