



STATE OF HAWAII  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO  
P.O. BOX 2360  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

**Date:** 02/06/2024

**Time:** 02:00 PM

**Location:** 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

**Committee:** House Education

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Title of Bill:** HB 1977 RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

**Purpose of Bill:** Establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for blind students. Requires the individualized education programs of blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. Requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center. Declares that the general fund expenditure ceiling is exceeded. Makes an appropriation.

**Department's Position:**

The Hawaii Department of Education (Department) respectively provides comments on HB 1977, which establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for blind students and requires the individualized education programs (IEP) for blind students to include the instruction of braille and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances, and establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center.

The Department supports the goal of promoting braille literacy instruction and the timely access to braille instructional materials. The IEP teams are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) §300.324(2)(iii) to provide instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the team determines, after an evaluation of the student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the student's future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille), that instruction in braille or the use of braille is not appropriate for the student. Schools are required to monitor student progress throughout the school year and review the IEP at least annually to ensure students who are blind or visually impaired are able to

access the general education curriculum.

The Department continues efforts to promote and make available braille instructional materials by contracting with a braille transcriber, providing explicit guidance on how to obtain accessible instructional materials, collaborating with the National Prison Braille Network, and ensuring that at least one Teacher of Students with Visual Impairment in each complex area can provide braille instruction. The Department has an assigned Ex Officio Trustee of the American Printing House (APH) board who oversees and facilitates the use of APH Quota Funds.

The Department also recognizes the value of collaboration and currently partners with the University of Hawaii at Manoa, Portland State University, Hawaii State Library for the Blind and Print Disabled, Hawaii Association of the Blind, Guide Dogs of Hawaii, and the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Hoopono Program and believes that building a strong network of partners contributes to the collective efficacy in serving students.

Finally, the Department agrees that due to costs associated with ensuring accessible educational materials, an additional appropriation would be necessary should this bill be enacted. Although the bill provides for financial resources, because the workload of this legislation requires highly specialized experts to carry out the functions of the Braille Literacy Resource Center, funded and dedicated full-time employees are needed for statewide coordination, guidance, and clerical upkeep. Therefore, if the proposed bill were to be enacted, the Department would require recurring funds to maintain operations of the Braille Literacy Resource Center.

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



**TESTIMONY OF  
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL  
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA  
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2024**

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**ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:**

H.B. NO. 1977, RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

**BEFORE THE:**

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

**DATE:** Tuesday, February 6, 2024      **TIME:** 2:00 p.m.

**LOCATION:** State Capitol, Room 309 and Videoconference

**TESTIFIER(S):** Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or  
Emma R. Christopherson, Deputy attorney General

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Chair Woodson and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill: (1) establishes a state policy to promote Braille literacy for blind students; (2) requires the individualized education programs (IEPs) of blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances; (3) requires the Department of Education (DOE) to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center; and (4) makes an appropriation.

The Department suggests the following revisions:

- Section 302A-C(a) of the new part added by section 2 of the bill provides that the individualized education program (IEP) for an eligible blind student shall include instruction in Braille and the provision of Braille instructional materials unless the IEP team determines that the instruction or materials are not necessary for the student "after current and future needs reading and writing performance assessments have been made." Page 3, lines 14-15. This should not be mandatory in all circumstances because it may not be possible to perform such assessments for every blind student, and making it mandatory would lead to inevitable non-compliance. There may be situations where such assessments may

not be appropriate – e.g., a blind student may have additional disabilities that hinder the student’s ability to access Braille material, such that it would be futile to perform these assessments. Because IEP teams are already required to consider, among other things, the results of the initial or most recent evaluation of a student, 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a), the Department recommends:

- Deleting the phrase "after current and future needs reading and writing performance assessments have been made" from lines 14-15 on page 3;
  - Revising section 302A-C(c)(3) on page 5, lines 11-13, to state: "Provide the date of the student's next literacy assessment, if one is to be conducted, not to exceed twelve months from the previous assessment; and" (new wording is underscored); and
  - Deleting the phrase "until the next assessment of the student's literacy needs" from section 302A-C(c)(4), lines 17-18, on page 5.
- Section 302A-C(b) states that Braille literacy instruction "shall be sufficient to enable the student to achieve at least grade level reading and writing proficiency expected of the student's peers of comparable ability to learn and progress from grade to grade in school." Page 3, line 18, through page 4, line 1. However, an IEP team cannot and does not guarantee results, such as having a student being on grade level with the student’s peers. See *Andrew F. ex rel. Joseph F. v. Douglas Cnty. Sch. Dist.*, 580 U.S. 386, 398 (2017) ("[T]he IDEA [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400, *et seq.*] cannot and does not promise any particular [educational] outcome" (internal quotation marks and citation omitted)). The Department recommends removing the first sentence of section 302A-C(b) on page 3, line 16, through page 4,

line 1, to prevent situations of non-compliance where compliance is not possible.

- Section 302A-C(c)(4) provides that if an IEP team determines that Braille literacy instruction is not necessary for a blind student, then the IEP shall include the parent's or student's "signed concurrence." However, the IDEA does not require that a parent or student sign an IEP. Pursuant to subsection (c)(4), if a parent/student does not provide a "signed concurrence," then this would potentially suggest that Braille literacy instruction *must* be provided, and the failure to do so is a denial of a free appropriate public education. To the extent that the use of Braille is a methodology, then it is the IEP team's decision whether or not to use that methodology, not the parent's or student's. The Department recommends deleting new section 302A-C(c)(4) on page 5, lines 14-18.

Additionally, there are some technical revisions that are needed, as follows:

- On page 3, line 3, "section 347.2" should be replaced with "section 347-2."
- On page 5, line 14, replace "parents" with "parent's or legal guardian's."
- On page 6, line 20, replace "parents" with "parent or legal guardian."

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



## 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

February 6, 2024

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

#### House Bill 1977 – Relating to Braille Literacy

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports the intent of House Bill 1977 – Relating to Braille Literacy.

This bill requires the individualized education programs of blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances to enable them to achieve Braille literacy, which is essential for them to learn and obtain and maintain remunerative employment, and opportunities in life.

This bill establishes a Braille literacy center that will, among other things, obtain Braille materials as needed; award and administer grants or contracts with qualified entities, or otherwise fund in whole or in part a qualified entity to provide transcription services; register eligible blind students with the Department of Human Services pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes §347-6; provide to parents and the student comprehensive information about Braille literacy instruction, Braille instructional materials, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including tools and options available to assess the student's Braille literacy needs; and as appropriate, involve the eligible blind student in his or her individualized education program.

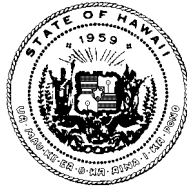
For the above reasons, DCAB supports the intent of House Bill 1977.

Thank you for considering our position.

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  
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**TRISTA SPEER**  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 5, 2024

To: The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair  
House Committee on Education

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB1977 – RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.**

Hearing: Tuesday, February 6, 2024, 2:00 p.m.  
Conference Room 309, State Capitol & Video Conference

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure as it provides expanded educational and employment opportunities for individuals with visual impairments. DHS defers to the Department of Education on the impact this proposal may have on its services.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the bill is to establish state policy promoting Braille literacy for blind students. It requires the individualized education programs of blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. It also requires the Department of Education (DOE) to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center, and makes an appropriation.

Ho`opono Services for the Blind, a branch of the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), recognizes that reading and writing skills are essential for blind individuals who are seeking higher education and competitive, integrated employment. Technology is not a replacement for literacy.

February 5, 2024

Page 2

Ho`opono Services for the Blind works with blind and visually impaired individuals to teach many skills, such as orientation and mobility, home management, Braille, and other areas, to prepare them for vocational training, higher education, and employment. Building skills and confidence in these areas contributes to our clients' sense of independence and the ability to be contributing members of their community.

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



**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/2/2024 9:55:40 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Louis Erteschik	Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

While there may be even more effective technology to aid students who are blind, braille certainly has been and remains a core component of what is utilized to assist them in reading and learning. For those reasons, we support the Bill.

Testimony of James Gashel  
Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii  
Committee on Education (EDN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024  
February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii, proudly supporting HB1977 on behalf of blind people and blind students in particular. Thank you for considering this important bill and for scheduling this hearing.

HB1977 declares: "It is the policy of the state to promote Braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual."

Supporting this policy, "The legislature finds that literacy skills are fundamental to success in education, employment, and life for all members of society, including individuals who are blind. The legislature further finds that braille literacy skills are essential for individuals who are blind to learn, seek and maintain remunerative employment, and access the opportunities in life open to all regardless of disability.

The legislature also finds that it is the interest of the State to make learning opportunities available to all residents. Therefore, it is necessary for the State to promote braille instruction and the timely access to braille instructional materials for blind students, parents, teachers, and other school personnel."

These are powerful words, saying blind people, and particularly blind keiki matter to the legislature and the people in the Aloha State. You all know literacy education is fundamental to success in life. When we're blind, our literacy toolbox must include strong braille reading and writing skills. HB1977 affirms this understanding.

Braille is the system of reading and writing by touch, used by blind people throughout the world. This year, 2024, is being observed as the 200th anniversary of the Braille system since its inventor, Louis Braille, started work on the Braille system in 1824 when he was only age 15. Braille lived in Coupvray France and became blind due to a childhood accident.

In 2022, here in Hawaii, our Department of Education (DOE) registered 170 K-12 students as having visual impairments enough to qualify for special education materials paid for by the federal government and available to states from the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), located in Louisville, Kentucky. APH has been providing K-12 school books in Braille Since 1879.

In 2022, only 30 out of the 170 K-12 students DOE registered with APH for special education materials use Braille. That's 30 out of 170 DOE knows can't see enough to read ordinary printed books, leaving 140 out of 170 to struggle along some way in school. We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could. HB1977 is for these students and thousands more in the future who can't see or read very well but still won't get Braille materials or Braille instruction without a stronger mandate from the legislature.

A 2018 study, reported in the Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research, concludes: "... individuals who were primary braille readers since childhood had greater life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and job satisfaction than individuals who reported not using braille as their primary reading medium during childhood." Also: "Findings support the premise that braille literacy is key to life satisfaction and self-esteem in addition to academic and job success." And: "Those who are Braille literate are more likely to be employed than those who are not."

This bill asks the legislature to pass a pro-active Braille literacy law, including establishment of a Braille Resource Center to provide a focal point within DOE to implement this policy. This will also better ensure consideration of Braille services when developing each blind student's individualized education program, consistent with federal law and existing DOE regulations. Thirty-three states have laws that call for greater Braille instruction in K-12 education, but Hawaii is not among these states. Clearly we can do better, and we should.

Speaking on behalf of the members of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii and our blind keiki members too, I am proud to ask you to support and pass HB1977. Standing up for literacy is never the wrong thing to do. Please affirm this value for the blind people in our state today and tomorrow. Mahalo for your consideration

**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 4:42:55 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tabatha Mitchell	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Aloha members of Education Committee,

I am Tabatha Mitchell of Kaneohe, Hawai'i. I am mother of a blind child that will be graduating from Kalaheo High School this May. She has been very busy submitting her college applications, and determining her interests for future study as she embarks on the next steps to build her career. As a parent, like many of you, it's exciting to watch our children blossom. My daughter started reviving Braille training as soon as she was identified as blind. I know, without a doubt, that this is THE reason that she has been able to be competitive in her classrooms and is on track to be graduating with STEM honors, and on her way to college. Please recognize that she is not an anomaly - a special case - an unusually intelligent kid. She's just like every kid, she just happens to be blind, and she just happened to get Braille instruction and held to the same standards as her sighted peers as she was learning to read and write. This should be the reality for EVERY blind kid. Blind students should NOT be pulled out of the classrooms to teach them to read & write. They miss out on highly important classroom dynamics and grade level culture. Furthermore, they should be expected to progress through the same reading & writing milestones as their sighted peers. THIS is how we move blind children into the workforce instead of railroading them into poverty with a life living off of disability payments. Please support HB1977, and help us help the blind keiki of Hawai'i.

**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 8:46:36 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Clifford Miyashiro, testifying to support HB1977 on behalf of blind people and blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

Testimony of Donald Sakamoto  
Before the Committee on Education (EDN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024  
February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, testifying to support HB1977 for those blind people and blind students who wish to use braille.

HB1977 says: "It is the policy of the state to promote Braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual."

Many years ago, a young blind boy by the name of Terence Tom lived on Oahu and was able to learn how to read braille throughout his life. In fact, he was able to become a well-known attorney, and served as the first blind state house of representative for the 48<sup>th</sup> district for some 16 years.

The time is now to prepare to have this bill passed to have our blind students the opportunity to learn braille in our schools in order to succeed in their lives such as Terence Tom did. Famous "by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" by Benjamin Franklin.

Mahalo for considering HB1977, and let's prepare to do the right thing and "Go For Broke" and approve this bill to proceed forward.

**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 11:02:11 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Deborah Gabe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Before the Committee on Education (EDN)

Hawai'i State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024

February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Deborah Gabe, testifying to support HB1977 on behalf of blind people and blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

HB1977 says: "It is the policy of the state to promote Braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual."

People considered "blind" are not just those who have no residual vision at all, that is, "totally blind". It also refers to those who have lost enough vision so as to warrant the use of accommodations or other so-called "blindness" skills that people who are fully sighted do not need to use in their daily lives.

It should be noted that fully sighted high school graduates who attend college have a reading level between 200 to 250 words per minute. Many partially blind, or visually-impaired, students are taught to read only print using enlarged or magnified print. That's a good thing for them to learn. However, I know from personal experience that once you begin enlarging or magnifying print, your reading speed degrades. And the more you have to magnify the print, the slower the reading speed gets. I also know that a person who reads magnified print cannot read this way for any length of time longer than approximately 20 minutes without getting headaches, severe eyestrain, and great fatigue.

I also know from talking with many parents whose visually-impaired children receive special ed services in the DOE , that when the reading speed and levels of these children are measured, they are not compared with sighted peers, but with other visually-impaired peers. And then the parents are told that their children's reading is "just fine".

Many students with partial blindness are not taught braille because the students can see print (with enlargement or magnification). This is very short-sighted thinking. I also know that as high schoolers, their reading speeds may be down as low as 35 words per minute. How can they possibly compete with sighted peers when they go to college or grad school or looking for jobs? And how fair is it for the parents not to be told the whole truth about their child's reading level?

Many parents initially think it's a good thing that their partially blind child does not "need" to learn braille since the child can see magnified print. But these parents are not told about Dr. Edward Bell's several research articles showing that people with any degree of blindness have the best chance of finding a job and getting paid a "good" salary if they use braille on a daily basis. And I know from talking with parents and hearing their children read braille, that the children who begin learning braille between ages 3 and 5 years, can end up reading braille at between 300 to 400 words per minute. Do you think that these observations and facts might convince more than a few parents to urge the DOE to begin teaching braille to their children?

A partially blind person has choices in their toolbox for reading if they are taught not only print but also braille. I, for example, prefer to read in braille, but I will use a magnifier to look at photos or other graphics.

Some short-sighted educators might say that these children learn how to use screen reader software on computers, so they don't need braille. However, would one say that a fully sighted child does not need to learn how to read print from paper or books if they know how to read it from a computer? Obviously not. They are given options.

There are also a good many young children who have blindness from something that will cause their vision to deteriorate further over time. If they are taught braille as young children, they would be ready to use it more and more as their vision worsens. I have such an eye condition and I was not taught braille until I could no longer see print at the age of 55 years. Since I learned it so late and although I use braille all the time, my reading speed has yet to break 100 words per minute.

In 2022, only 30 out of the 170 K-12 students DOE registered with APH for special education materials use Braille. That's 30 out of 170 DOE knows can't see enough to read ordinary printed books, leaving 140 out of 170 to struggle along some way in school. We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could. HB1977 is for these students and thousands more in the future who can't see or read very well but still won't get Braille materials or Braille instruction without a stronger mandate from the legislature.

I strongly urge you to support and pass HB1977.

Mahalo for your consideration of this very important bill.



Hello Committee Chair, Vice Chair and members,

I want to express my strong support for HB1977. As a retired bling professional, I can categorically say that my almost 45 year career in higher education would not been possible, if I had not possessed strong Braille reading and writing skills.

Cany educators assume that if a child has any usable vision, Braille is not needed. I was one of those children. I lost all of my remaining sight during my first year of college. If I had not asked a blind friend to teach me Braille, I can't imagine what sort of job history I could have had.

Braille should be an option for more children, because many people either lose entirely or experience greatly reduced sight.

Over 30 other states have adopted similar legislation to promote the availability of Braille instruction, for those who want to explore that option.

Respectfully,

Ann Lemke, Ph.D

**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 12:31:00 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony of Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Before the Committee on Education (EDN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024

February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, a student at Kalāheo High School on the Windward side of O‘ahu. I am testifying in support of HB1977 on behalf of my fellow blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

Braille is what I use to read and write every single day. It is a comprehensive and effective tactile system used by blind people to interact with writing. Thanks to the advocacy of my family and school system, I began receiving braille instruction before I was in kindergarten. This allowed me to be on track with the literacy skills of my peers from day one. All of us enjoyed the same stories and groaned through the same spelling tests.

Now that I’m in high school, braille is even more critical to my success. In English, I use braille to insure my papers are of the highest quality. In Chemistry, I relied on braille to balance chemical equations. In Modern History of Hawai‘i, I used braille alongside audio to learn oli. Most critically for me now is my use of braille to understand calculus. But, my favorite use of braille is for quiet leisure reading after a busy day. I am so glad I get to graduate from high school the same year braille turns 200 years old.

That was my experience. I was lucky. Here in Hawai‘i, our Department of Education (DOE) registered 170 K-12 students as having visual impairments enough to qualify for special education materials in 2022. Of those, only 30 out of 170 use braille, leaving 140 out of 170 (about 82.4%) to somehow get through school. We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could. HB1977 is for these students and thousands more in the future who can't see or read very well but still won't get Braille materials or Braille instruction without a stronger mandate from the legislature.

This bill asks the legislature to pass a pro-active Braille literacy law. Thirty-three states have laws that call for greater Braille instruction in K-12 education, but Hawai'i is not among these states. Clearly we can do better.

I love braille. I love that I get to immerse myself in stories, challenge myself with high level math, read maps of our world, and write down my thoughts in a format that I can read in the future. I want every blind student in Hawai'i to feel the joy of literacy like I do. I also want every blind student to have the fewest barriers to success as possible. Bringing students through school without teaching them a way to consume information efficiently is surely creating an unnecessary barrier.

I am pleased to live in a state with such forward thinking legislation regarding blind people in place. Let's add the promotion of literacy to the list.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Emerie Mitchell-Butler

# **HAWAII ASSOCIATION OF THE BLIND**

February 5, 2024

Representative Justin H. Woodson Chair

House Committee on Education

Representative Linda Ichiyama, Chair

House Committee on Water & Land

RE: Submitting Testimony in Support of H.B. 1977, Relating to Braille Literacy

Dear Chair Justin H. Woodson and Chair Linda Ichiyama,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of H.B. 1977.

The Hawaii Association of the Blind (HAB) The Hawaii Association of the Blind is a 501c3 non-profit organization, an entity that survives on the generosity of donors who share in the support of Blind and Visually Impaired people in the State of Hawaii, including students of the Department of Education and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Ho'opono Services for the Blind.

Learning braille can make a dramatic difference in the life of a visually impaired child or adult. Some reasons to learn braille:

- Braille enables children who cannot read print to become literate and helps adults who lose the ability to read due to blindness or low vision to continue enjoying books, newspapers, and magazines.
- Braille provides blind people with access to spelling, punctuation and other aspects of written language less accessible through audio alone.
- Braille literacy directly correlates with academic achievement and employment.
- Braille is an irreplaceable and modern method for literacy.

- Braille can be read in the dark.

The Department of Education, under Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, provide services and accommodations to students who have visual impairments. HAB believes it is therefore essential, for all the reasons as stated above, that state Department of Education policy be established to promote braille literacy for blind students as well as a Braille Literacy Resource Center. HAB strongly believes that what H.B. 1977 proposes is a long time coming. Mahalo for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of H.B. 1977.

Howard Lesser, Chair, HAB Advocacy Committee,

801 South St., #3609, Honolulu, HI 96813, tel 808-227-8428

howardlesser@ymail.com

Art Cabanilla, HAB President

Maureen Sheedy, HAB Secretary

Advocacy Committee members include:

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Keao Wright

Deborah Braiman

Norman Ota

Anthony and Terry Akamine

Vickie Kennedy

Miles Tamashiro

Roberta Tomas

Ronald Flormata

Joline Cardenas

Clifford Miyashiro

**LATE**

**HB-1977**

Submitted on: 2/5/2024 2:00:15 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/6/2024 2:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Christopher Butler	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

I will support in person.

Brandon Young

2/4/2024

Testimony of Brandon Young  
Before the Committee on Education (EDN)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024  
February 6, 2024, 2:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good Afternoon Chair and Vice Chair,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I am writing in support of this bill. I believe that blind students should have access to braille literacy just like their sighted counterparts that are in the classroom. I am blind myself and went through the State of Hawaii Department of Education system. The DOE knew that I had a degenerative eye condition since the beginning of my educational career at Kindergarten, but refused to teach me braille until I was in high school. At this time, I had lost the majority of my vision and was virtually illiterate because I could not read regular print. Due to this fact, I have struggled to read braille at a minimal reading speed. My reading speed did not improve until I attended the Louisiana Center for the Blind after graduating from college. It is also unacceptable for the state not to have anyone that can transcribe hard copy braille here on island. This needs to change. I hope that you will support this bill so that we can improve the lives of blind and visually impaired children in the state of Hawaii. I thank you for your time and look forward to testifying in person at the hearing on Tuesday. Have a wonderful day.