

JAN 23 2025

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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

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RELATING TO ACT 253, SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2023.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1       SECTION 1. Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023,  
2       established the neighbor islands blind and visually impaired  
3       service pilot program within the department of human services.  
4       The goal of Act 253 is to bridge the gaps in services for blind  
5       and low vision residents across the State, particularly focusing  
6       on those living on the neighbor islands. The department's  
7       efforts to implement the Act were delayed until July 2024 as the  
8       department's staff were responding to the needs of staff and  
9       residents impacted by the August 2023 Maui wildfires.

10       Despite the delays, the department engaged a consultant,  
11       posted a survey, and had several in-person and virtual meetings  
12       to gather information from blind and low vision neighbor island  
13       residents to discuss potential training and services that the  
14       pilot program may offer. A report to the legislature was  
15       submitted in December 2024 detailing the department's efforts,  
16       findings, and recommendations that include requests for two  
17       additional temporary full-time equivalent positions within the  
18       department and appropriations to implement the pilot program.

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1       The purposes of this Act are to:

2       (1)   Rename the pilot program to replace the term "visually  
3           impaired" with the less stigmatizing term "low  
4           vision," and

5       (2)   Clarify the pilot program's implementation timeframes

6       SECTION 2.   Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023, section  
7   2, is amended as follows:

8       1.   By amending subsections (a) and (b) to read:

9       "(a)   The department shall establish a neighbor islands  
10   blind and [~~visually-impaired~~] low vision service pilot program  
11   to provide training and other services to blind and [~~visually~~  
12   ~~impaired~~] low vision individuals residing on the neighbor  
13   islands.

14       (b)   The pilot program shall provide peer-to-peer outreach,  
15   sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, and mobility  
16   training to program participants, including:

17       (1)   Outreach efforts to identify individual and program  
18           needs;

19       (2)   Coordination with existing programs to ensure that  
20           existing services are identified and used to the  
21           maximum extent possible;

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- (3) Adjustment services, including individual and group counseling;
- (4) Access to and training for use of telecommunications services to receive current news, weather alerts, and other vital public information;
- (5) Awareness development and training for the use of technology, including but not limited to 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.

The services provided by the pilot program pursuant to this subsection shall be provided by volunteers, who shall be recruited, assigned, and supervised by the department or an entity contracted by the department to organize and implement the pilot program. All volunteers shall have the necessary qualifications, be chosen based on experience and training, and use training methods consistent with the structured discovery

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1 approach used by the new visions program operated by the Ho'opono  
2 services for the blind branch within the department's division  
3 of vocational rehabilitation."

4 2. By amending subsections (f) to (h) to read:

5 "(f) The department shall enter into a contract with a  
6 nonprofit organization to recruit, train, and supervise  
7 volunteer service corps members and oversee the pilot program;  
8 provided that existing department personnel may be assigned to  
9 fulfill administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the pilot  
10 program. Any contract entered into pursuant to this subsection  
11 shall be exempt from chapters 103D and 103F. Any nonprofit  
12 organization contracted under this subsection shall have:

13 (1) The knowledge, experience, and qualifications  
14 necessary to provide peer support services to program  
15 participants;

16 (2) A management team, consisting of officers and  
17 directors, of whom a majority are blind or ~~[visually~~  
18 ~~impaired,~~ low vision; and

19 (3) Membership chapters or organization subunits located  
20 on the neighbor islands that will be served by the  
21 pilot program.

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(g) The department shall establish a neighbor islands blind and ~~[visually-impaired]~~ low vision service pilot program working group composed of neighbor island residents who are blind or ~~[visually-impaired]~~ low vision to make recommendations regarding the establishment and implementation of the pilot program. The department, in collaboration with the working group, shall develop a written implementation plan that includes a pilot program performance period and program budget, and shall submit the plan, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of ~~[2024.]~~ 2025. The working group shall be exempt from the requirements of part I of chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

(h) The department shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations pertaining to the neighbor islands blind and ~~[visually-impaired]~~ low vision service pilot program to the legislature no later than thirty days prior to the convening of the regular session of 2029. The report shall include:

(1) A record of pilot program activities and accomplishments;

(2) A recommendation on whether to extend the pilot program; and

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1 (3) Any proposed legislation."

2 3. By amending subsections (j) and (k) to read:

3 "(j) The pilot program [~~shall begin no later than January~~  
4 ~~1, 2024, and~~] shall cease to exist on July 30, 2029.

5 (k) For purposes of this section:

6 "Department" means the department of human services.

7 "Neighbor island" means a county with a population less  
8 than five hundred thousand.

9 "Pilot program" means the neighbor islands blind and  
10 [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot program established  
11 pursuant to this Act.

12 "Program participant" means a resident of a neighbor island  
13 whose mobility or ability to live independently is substantially  
14 limited due to loss of sight and who is participating in the  
15 neighbor islands blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision  
16 service pilot program.

17 "Special needs transportation" means transportation  
18 provided to program participants at times or for trips when  
19 public transportation is not a reasonable option."

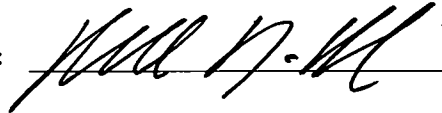
20 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed  
21 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

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1       SECTION 5. This Act, upon its approval, shall take effect  
2 on July 1, 2025, and shall be repealed on June 30, 2029.

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INTRODUCED BY: 

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BY REQUEST

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**Report Title:**

DHS; Neighbor Islands Blind and Low Vision Service Pilot Program

**Description:**

Updates the name of the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program established by Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023, by replacing the term "visually impaired" with the term "low vision" and clarifies the pilot program's implementation timeframes. Sunsets 6/30/2029.

*The summary description of legislation appearing on this page is for informational purposes only and is not legislation or evidence of legislative intent.*



JUSTIFICATION SHEET

**SB. NO. 1419**

DEPARTMENT: Human Services

TITLE: A BILL FOR AN ACT RELATING TO ACT 253,  
SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2023.

PURPOSE: To update the name of the Neighbor Islands  
Blind and Visually Impaired Pilot Program,  
delete the deadline to establish the pilot  
program, and make technical amendments  
clarifying awareness of technology.

MEANS: Amends section 2(a), (b), (f) to (h), (j),  
and (k) of Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii  
2023 (Act 253).

JUSTIFICATION: Act 253 established the Neighbor Islands  
Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot  
Program within the Department and made  
appropriations. Act 253 set a reporting  
deadline for the Department for twenty days  
prior to the 2024 legislative session and  
mandated that the pilot program begin by  
January 1, 2024.

Unfortunately, in August 2023, DHS staff and  
resources were a part of the State's  
emergency management response to the August  
2023 Maui Wildfires. Consequently, staff  
were not able to timely access the funds  
appropriated by Act 253 and complete the  
work in time to submit a report to the 2024  
legislature and start the program on January  
1, 2024. To implement the program now, we  
are advised that the deadlines need to be  
amended or deleted.

In 2024, the leadership of the Division of  
Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) and the  
Director's Office remained committed to the  
pilot project and found other funds to  
procure a consultant needed to facilitate  
the Act 243 working group. The consultant  
facilitated the necessary outreach with  
neighboring island blind and low vision  
communities and prepared a report to the

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2025 legislature describing the pilot program and recommending appropriations to fund the pilot program.

One recommendation was to change the term "visually impaired" to "low vision" as "low vision" is considered less stigmatizing in the field and community and acknowledges that pilot program participants may have some vision. Other recommendations included adding two temporary full-time equivalent positions (2.0 FTE), a project specialist IV SR-22, and an administrative assistant SR-14, and appropriations of general funds for the staff, contracting services, and equipment necessary to implement the pilot program in the amounts of \$612,210 for fiscal year 2025-2026, and \$1,694,644 for fiscal year 2026-2027.

A Governor's message will be submitted to request that general funds be appropriated through the executive budget bill for the pilot program. DVR's Ho'opono program comprises federally-funded services for the blind and low vision related to accessing employment. The existing federal funds may not be used to support this pilot project that aims to provide services to the neighbor island blind and low vision community members interested in gaining skills and mobility, though not necessarily seeking employment.

The bill also broadens awareness of technology generally available for communication.

Impact on the public: When implemented, neighbor island residents who are blind or have low vision will have access to training, transportation, and other services not currently available on neighbor islands. These services will support individuals' independence, social connections, and well-being. The impact on the public is positive; as pilot project participants gain

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skills and mobility, they will be more likely to contribute to their community's diversity and inclusiveness.

Impact on the department and other agencies:

The Department will need to adopt administrative rules, hire qualified staff, and implement new programs in different communities. The Department of the Attorney General will need to assist with drafting the administrative rules and assist with procurement.

GENERAL FUND: None.

OTHER FUNDS: None.

PPBS PROGRAM  
DESIGNATION: HMS 802.

OTHER AFFECTED  
AGENCIES: Department of the Attorney General

EFFECTIVE DATE: July 1, 2025.