
A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO ACT 253, SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2023.

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

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

11 Despite the delays, the department of human services
12 engaged a consultant, posted a survey, and had several in-person
13 and virtual meetings to gather information from blind and low
14 vision neighbor island residents to discuss potential training
15 and services that the pilot program may offer. A report to the
16 legislature was submitted in December 2024 detailing the
17 department's efforts, findings, and recommendations, including



1 requests for two additional temporary full-time equivalent
2 positions within the department and appropriations to implement
3 the pilot program.

4 The purpose of this Act is to:

5 (1) Rename the pilot program by replacing the term
6 "visually impaired" with the less stigmatizing term
7 "low vision"; and

8 (2) Clarify the pilot program's implementation timeframes.

9 SECTION 2. Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023, is
10 amended as follows:

11 1. By amending section 1 to read:

12 "SECTION 1. The legislature finds that thousands of Hawaii
13 residents have visual disabilities that hamper daily living and
14 may lead to isolation, limited productivity, loss of
15 independence, and lack of social integration. The department of
16 human services estimates that there are twelve thousand Hawaii
17 residents who are blind or ~~[have a significant visual~~
18 ~~impairment,]~~ low vision, many of whom live on Oahu where access
19 to opportunities and services are better organized and readily
20 available compared to the neighbor islands.



1 The legislature further finds that state and local support
2 services for blind or [~~visually impaired~~] low vision
3 individuals, including training, adjustment to blindness
4 services, and transportation services, are provided through
5 economies of scale, and therefore tend to benefit residents in
6 populated areas as compared to those in sparsely populated
7 areas. As such, approximately two thousand neighbor island
8 residents who are blind or [~~visually impaired~~] low vision are
9 left with the choice of either moving to Oahu or living without
10 the opportunity to have full and integrated lives in their
11 existing communities.

12 Accordingly, the legislature finds that there is a need for
13 a supplemental service program that provides additional support
14 services to blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision individuals
15 residing on neighbor islands.

16 The purpose of this Act is to:

17 (1) Require the department of human services to:

18 (A) Establish a neighbor islands blind and [~~visually~~
19 ~~impaired~~] low vision service pilot program that
20 supplements existing statewide services by
21 providing training and other services to neighbor



1 island residents who are blind or [~~visually~~
2 ~~impaired~~] low vision;

3 (B) Establish a neighbor islands blind and [~~visually~~
4 ~~impaired~~] low vision service pilot program
5 working group to develop a pilot program
6 implementation plan and submit the plan to the
7 legislature before the regular session of 2024;
8 and

9 (C) Submit a report on the neighbor islands blind and
10 [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot
11 program to the legislature prior to the regular
12 session of 2029; and

13 (2) Appropriate funds for the establishment and operation
14 of the neighbor islands blind and [~~visually impaired~~]
15 low vision service pilot program and working group."

16 2. By amending subsections (a) and (b) in section 2 to
17 read:

18 "(a) The department shall establish a neighbor islands
19 blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot program
20 to provide training and other services to blind and [~~visually~~



1 ~~impaired]~~ low vision individuals residing on the neighbor
2 islands.

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

6 (1) Outreach efforts to identify individual and program
7 needs;

8 (2) Coordination with existing programs to ensure that
9 existing services are identified and used to the
10 maximum extent possible;

11 (3) Adjustment services, including individual and group
12 counseling;

13 (4) Access to and training for use of telecommunications
14 services to receive current news, weather alerts, and
15 other vital public information;

16 (5) Awareness development and training for the use of
17 technology, including but not limited to computers,
18 smart phones, and other communications devices;

19 (6) Daily living, self-care, and home management skills;

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

3. By amending subsections (f) to (h) in section 2 to read:

"(f) The department shall enter into a contract with a nonprofit organization to recruit, train, and supervise volunteer service corps members and oversee the pilot program; provided that existing department personnel may be assigned to



1 fulfill administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the pilot
2 program. Any contract entered into pursuant to this subsection
3 shall be exempt from chapters 103D and 103F. Any nonprofit
4 organization contracted under this subsection shall have:

5 (1) The knowledge, experience, and qualifications
6 necessary to provide peer support services to program
7 participants;

8 (2) A management team, consisting of officers and
9 directors, of whom a majority are blind or [~~visually~~
10 ~~impaired;~~] low vision; and

11 (3) Membership chapters or organization subunits located
12 on the neighbor islands that will be served by the
13 pilot program.

14 (g) The department shall establish a neighbor islands
15 blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot program
16 working group composed of neighbor island residents who are
17 blind or [~~visually impaired~~] low vision to make recommendations
18 regarding the establishment and implementation of the pilot
19 program. The department, in collaboration with the working
20 group, shall develop a written implementation plan that includes
21 a pilot program performance period and program budget, and shall



1 submit the plan, including any proposed legislation, to the
2 legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of
3 the regular session of [~~2024.~~] 2026. The working group shall be
4 exempt from the requirements of part I of chapter 92, Hawaii
5 Revised Statutes.

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

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

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

15 (3) Any proposed legislation."

16 4. By amending subsections (j) and (k) in section 2 to
17 read:

18 "(j) The pilot program [~~shall begin no later than January~~
19 ~~1, 2024, and~~] shall cease to exist on July 30, 2029.

20 (k) For purposes of this section:

21 "Department" means the department of human services.



1 "Neighbor island" means a county with a population less
2 than five hundred thousand.

3 "Pilot program" means the neighbor islands blind and
4 [~~visually-impaired~~] low vision service pilot program established
5 pursuant to this Act.

6 "Program participant" means a resident of a neighbor island
7 whose mobility or ability to live independently is substantially
8 limited due to loss of sight and who is participating in the
9 neighbor islands blind and [~~visually-impaired~~] low vision
10 service pilot program.

11 "Special needs transportation" means transportation
12 provided to program participants at times or for trips when
13 public transportation is not a reasonable option."

14 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed
15 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

16 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, and
17 shall be repealed on June 30, 2029.



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, SLH 2023, by replacing the term "visually impaired" with the term "low vision" and clarifies the pilot program's implementation timeframes. Sunsets 6/30/2029. (HD1)

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