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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  
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TRISTA SPEER  
DEPUTY DIRECTOR  
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 25, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 1419 SD1 HD1 – RELATING TO ACT 253, SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2023.**

Hearing: March 27, 2025, at 3:30 p.m.

Conference Room 308 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

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

**PURPOSE:** This bill updates the name of the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program established by Act 253, Session Laws of Hawai'i 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)

DHS appreciates the amendments of the Committee on Health and Human Services that amended the measure by:

- (1) Clarifying that the Department of Human Services shall submit a written implementation plan for the Neighbor Islands Blind and Low Vision Service Pilot Program to the Legislature prior to the convening of the regular session of 2026, rather than the regular session of 2025; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity and consistency. (SD1)

DHS appreciates the amendments of the Committee in Human Services & Homelessness that further amended the measure by:

- (1) Replacing references to “visually impaired” with the term “low vision” in the preamble of Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023; and
- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style. (HD1)

Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023 (Act 253), established the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program within the Department of Human Services. The goal of Act 253 is to bridge the gaps in services for blind and low vision residents across the State, particularly focusing on those living on the neighbor islands. The DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (DVR) efforts to implement the Act were delayed until July 2024, as staff were responding to the needs of staff and residents impacted by the August 2023 Maui wildfires.

Despite the delays, DVR engaged a consultant, posted a survey, and held several in-person and virtual meetings to gather information from blind and low-vision neighbor island residents, discussing potential training and services that the pilot program may offer. A report to the legislature was submitted in December 2024, detailing the DVR's efforts, findings, and recommendations from the working group. These recommendations include requests for two additional temporary full-time equivalent positions within the department and appropriations to implement the pilot program. The report to the legislature may be found at

[https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ryamane\\_Act-253-2023\\_Neighbor-Island-Blind-Low-Vision-Pilot-Program.pdf](https://humanservices.hawaii.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Ryamane_Act-253-2023_Neighbor-Island-Blind-Low-Vision-Pilot-Program.pdf).

This bill will enable DVR to continue implementing the pilot program. If successful, DVR will extend and supplement the existing services provided by the Ho`opono Services for the Blind Branch of the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. The services, envisioned by Act 253 and recommended by the working group, will include: peer-to-peer outreach, sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, transportation, technology access, enrichment activities, workforce development, mobility training, advocacy training, and other services. These services will support participants' goals to become and sustain their independence and improve their social integration. The pilot program would not require participants to be seeking employment, although the skills gained would contribute to their employability. The pilot

program aims to serve 150 individuals in the first year (SFY 26) and 250 individuals in the second year (SFY 27).

For the state fiscal biennium 25-27, to implement the pilot program, State-funded positions are requested as DVR's current federal grant requirements do not allow the provision of services to individuals ineligible for Ho`opono's existing programs. Ho`opono's federal funding requires the participant to be seeking employment. DVR's Ho`opono program will need one (1.00) FTE Program Specialist IV and one (1.00) FTE Administrative Assistant II for a total of \$193,230 in general funds over the biennium. Additional general funds are required for Implementation Support (\$70,000), Program Costs and Supplies (\$85,000), Contracted Providers of Services (\$1,625,000), Assistive Technology (\$325,000), and Travel (\$8,624) for a total of \$2,113,824 over the biennium.

Governor's Message (GM) Number 8, dated March 21, 2025, requests the addition of funds to the executive budget that supports this pilot program as follows: 2.00 general-funded temporary FTEs and \$612,210 in general funds for FY 26 and \$1,694,644 in general funds for FY 27 to provide staff and funding for the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program in the Vocational Rehabilitation program (HMS 802/GA). With this bill and the budget appropriation, DVR will take the next steps toward providing services and skills for blind and low-vision residents on neighbor islands that enhance social interaction, independence, and community participation.

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



## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813  
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • Fax (808) 586-8129 • (808) 204-2466 (VP)

March 27, 2025

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

Senate Bill 1419 SD1 HD1 – Relating to Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 1419 SD1 HD1, which 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)

Updating the terminology used in the program name ensures that it reflects current language preferences and aligns with best practices in disability-related terminology. The distinction between "low vision" and "blindness" provides more precise representation of individuals who may benefit from the program's services.

Additionally, the clarification of implementation timeframes will facilitate the effective administration of the pilot program, ensuring that services reach those in need as intended by Act 253, Session Laws of Hawai'i 2023.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW  
Executive Director



**STATE OF HAWAII**  
STATE COUNCIL  
ON DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES  
PRINCESS VICTORIA KAMĀMALU BUILDING  
1010 RICHARDS STREET, Room 122  
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March 27, 2025

The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair  
House Committee on Finance  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawai'i  
Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813

Dear Representative Yamashita, and Committee Members:

SUBJECT: SB1419 SD1 HD1 Relating to Act 253, Session Laws of Hawai'i

The Hawai'i State Council on Developmental Disabilities offering comments on SB1419 SD1 HD1, which 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)

**The Council respectfully requests replacing “Special Needs” on page 9, line 11 with “Access and Functional Needs.”**

The term "Access and Functional Needs" is the appropriate language when referring to adults with disabilities, particularly in emergency planning and service delivery. The phrase "Special Needs" is outdated and often associated with early intervention for children—using it for adults can be dismissive and fails to recognize their rights and individualized supports. There is nothing "special" about a person needing access to communication, mobility, or medical care—it's about ensuring equitable access and functional support for full participation in community life.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony offering comments **on SB1419 SD1 HD1.**

Sincerely,

SB1419 SD1 HD1 Relating to Act 253, Session Laws of Hawai'i

March 27, 2025

Page 2 of 2

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Daintry Bartoldus". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'D'.

Daintry Bartoldus  
Executive Administrator

**SB-1419-HD-1**

Submitted on: 3/27/2025 2:02:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/27/2025 3:30:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Samaya Gorham	On behalf of the Hawaii State Council on Developmental Disabilities	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testifying on the submitted testimony from the State Council on Developmental Disabilities.

Testimony of The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

By Katie Keim

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON FINANCE (FIN)

THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, REGULAR SESSION OF 2025

Thursday, March 27, 2025, 3:30 p.m. - Conference Room 308

Goodafternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members. My name is Katie keim, submitting testimony for the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, (NFBH), supporting SB 1419, SD1, HD1, RELATING TO ACT 253.

The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii supports the amendments replacing the term "visually impaired" with the term "low vision" and clarifying the pilot program's implementation timeframes.

As a leader in the NFB of Hawaii, nationally we have been working to establish the term "low vision" as the respected standard language adopted. SB1419 S.D. 1, is in line with the NFB national resolution.

In the past my career included a position in the Department of Human Services, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. My caseload consisted of primarily duties on Oahu, yet with limited instructors on our neighbor islands, traveled every few months to neighbor islands working with primarily older individuals who are blind teaching independent living skills essential to the quality of a blind and low vision individuals' life. Act 253 supports the need of our blind neighbor island residents for quality services in a timely and regular fashion. As an individual who became blind as an adult at the age of 36, the skills I learned and mentoring received by blind members of the National Federation of the Blind, gave me tools and hope that have enriched my life in ways I could not imagine at that time. Act 253 establishes an opportunity for hope for all blind and low vision residents of Hawaii.

The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii stands in support of SB 1419, SD1, HD1, and Act 253's important program to serve our neighbor island blind and low vision residents.

Mahalo for hearing SB 1419, SD1, HD1 and moving it forward this session.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, COMMITTEE ON FINANCE (FIN)

THE THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, REGULAR SESSION OF 2025

Thursday, March 27, 2025, 3:30 p.m. - Conference Room 308

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, (NFBH), supporting SB 1419, SD1, HD1, RELATING TO ACT 253.

Good afternoon, Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, (NFBH), supporting SB 1419 S.D. 1 H.D. 1, RELATING TO ACT 253, which established the neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program within the Department of Human Services.

I stand in support of the testimony submitted by The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii supporting the amendments replacing the term "visually impaired" with the term "low vision" and clarifying the pilot program's implementation timeframes.

Mahalo for hearing my testimony in support and moving SB 1419 S.D. 1 H.D. 1 forward this session.