



## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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March 13, 2025

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES & HOMELESSNESS

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

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

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,

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Executive Director

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March 12, 2025

TO: The Honorable Representative Lisa Marten, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services & Homelessness

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: March 13, 2025, 10:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 329 & 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. (SD1)

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.

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. DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's (DVR) efforts to implement the Act were delayed until July 2024 as the 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 had several in-person and virtual meetings to gather information from blind and low vision neighbor island residents to discuss potential training and services that the pilot program may offer. A report to the legislature was submitted in December 2024 detailing DVR's efforts, findings, and recommendations of the working group that 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 allow DVR to continue to implement 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 the participant to be seeking employment, though the skills gained would contribute to the participant's 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

March 12, 2025

Page 3

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.

Of note, the administration is currently reviewing DHS's request for a Governor's Message (GM) to include the above amounts in the executive budget.

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

Brandon Young

3/8/2025

Testimony for SB 1419

Dear Rep Martin and others,

My name is Brandon Young and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I am in support of HB 1419. This bill has now passed through the House and has come over to the Senate side. This bill extends a pilot program to provide blind services to individuals on the neighbor islands who are not able to travel to Oahu and Ho`opono to receive blind services. The amount of blind services on the neighbor island is very limited and we want to improve this. If this bill is passed, this will improve the lives of blind people who are living on our neighbor islands. I urge your committee to pass this bill. Thank you for your time in hearing our bill.