

ACT 37

H.B. NO. 987

A Bill for an Act Relating to Hearing and Vision Program.

Be It Enacted by the Legislature of the State of Hawaii:

SECTION 1. The legislature finds that early identification of hearing and vision loss, with appropriate follow-up services, is critical for the development of children's language and communication skills needed for learning in school.

A hearing and vision program for school children is mandated by section 321-101, Hawaii Revised Statutes, which operated from 1978 in the department of health and ended in 1995 due to budget reductions with the assumption that primary care providers would provide the hearing and vision screening. The department currently provides consultation and training on hearing and vision screening protocols and tools.

Improvement in hearing and vision screening for children is needed. Currently, hearing and vision screenings are conducted by primary care providers and community programs. However, providers and programs vary regarding protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up; screeners vary in their

training and skills for conducting screenings; and there is no uniform data collection for quality improvement.

Hawaii data indicate the need to improve vision screening, especially for younger ages. The National Survey of Children’s Health shows that the Hawaii vision screening rate of 33.2 per cent for children ages zero to five years ranks at forty-four out of fifty states. The Hawaii vision screening rate of 76.8 per cent for children ages six to eleven years and 76.4 per cent for youth ages twelve to seventeen years were both close to the national average.

The legislature further finds that Hawaii newborn hearing screening program data show a hearing loss rate of 4.5 per thousand infants. However, there is a need to continue hearing screening beyond the newborn period, as national data show that the hearing loss rate increases to about six per one thousand children by age six, due to congenital hearing loss that was not identified at birth or late onset or progressive hearing loss.

The purpose of this Act is to increase the early identification of children with hearing or vision loss, by establishing consistent protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up, screener training, and data collection and reporting.

SECTION 2. Chapter 321, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by amending part IX to read as follows:

“PART IX. [SYSTEMATIC] HEARING AND VISION PROGRAM

§321-101 [Systematic hearing] Hearing and vision program. (a) There is established a [systematic] hearing and vision program for children to be conducted by the department of health. The purpose of the program shall be to[:

- (1) ~~Detect and identify hearing and vision deficiencies in school children; and~~
- (2) ~~Recommend to their parents or guardians the need for appropriate evaluation of children who have hearing or vision deficiencies, or both, and follow-up and track completed evaluations, including diagnostic and treatment information.]~~

increase the early identification of hearing or vision loss in children by establishing consistent protocols for hearing and vision screening and follow-up, screener training, and data collection for quality improvement.

- (b) The department shall set recommended standards for:
 - (1) Protocols for evidence-based hearing and vision screening, including designation of ages or grades for screening;
 - (2) Screening tools, instruments, and passing and referral criteria for screening that are based on national guidelines and best practices;
 - (3) Referrals, tracking of referrals, and follow-up of children who do not pass screening;
 - (4) Training, certification, and qualifications of personnel who conduct hearing and vision screening, other than those who are licensed health care professionals acting within their legal scope of practice; and
 - (5) Data collection and reporting on hearing and vision screening, referral, and follow-up.

- ~~(b)~~ (c) Within available resources, the program shall include[:
 - (1) ~~Consultation with students, parents, and health and education personnel about treatment and rehabilitation of hearing and vision deficiencies; and~~
 - (2) ~~Education of students, health and education personnel, and the general public about preserving and caring for hearing and vision and about preventing hearing and vision deficiencies.~~

(e) ~~The departments of health and education, in cooperation with each other, may conduct classes and lectures in hearing and vision conservation and prevention of hearing loss and blindness for teachers, public health nurses, and others engaged in similar work. The departments shall also cooperate with public and private organizations and societies to educate the public in the importance of hearing and vision conservation.] consultation with and education of students, parents, and health and education personnel about hearing and vision screening, treatment, and services.~~"

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

SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect upon its approval.

(Approved June 15, 2022.)