



STATE OF HAWAII
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
KA 'OIHANA HO'ONA'AUAO
P.O. BOX 2360
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96804

Date: 03/10/2025

Time: 03:00 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: HB 0620, HD1 RELATING TO EDUCATION.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible blind students. Requires the individualized education programs and section 504 plans of eligible blind students to include the assessment and evaluation of eligible blind students' reading and writing abilities, instruction of braille, and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. Requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii Department of Education (Department) supports the intent of HB 620 HD1, which establishes state policy to promote braille literacy as well as a Braille Literacy Resource Center and respectfully provides comments. Should this measure move forward, the Department requests the following amendments to provide clarity on this measure.

To ensure that the bill's intent is fully inclusive and accurately reflects all students who are eligible for these services, the Department suggests using the term "low vision and blind students" in place of "blind students" throughout the bill.

Also, the Department recommends this revision on page 4, line 3.

~~And is blind or visually handicapped.~~ who has low vision or blindness.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams are required under the Individuals with Disabilities

Education Act (IDEA) and Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) Chapter 60 to provide instruction in Braille and the use of Braille unless, based on an evaluation of the student's reading and writing skills, the IEP team determines that such instruction is not appropriate. To clarify and reinforce the intent of this measure, the Department recommends the following revisions on page 2, lines 10 through 15:

- (1) ~~Require the department of education to include the instruction of braille and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances;~~ Establish requirements for access to braille educational services;
- (2) ~~Require the department of education to establish and maintain a braille literacy resource center;~~ Establish and maintain a Braille Literacy Resource Center within the department of education; and
- (3) Appropriate funds.

To ensure a more comprehensive definition of braille educational services, the Department suggests the following additions on page 3, lines 6 through 8:

"Braille educational services" means:

- (1) Assessment of an eligible low vision and blind student to evaluate the student's reading and writing ability, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media, including an evaluation of the student's current and future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille;
- ~~(1)~~(2) Instruction in reading and writing in braille; and
- ~~(2)~~(3) The provision of braille instructional materials.

In reference to Section 302A-C Braille Educational Services, the Department suggests revisions to ensure the intent of the IDEA and to leave the determination of the needs for assessments to the IEP team.

On page 5, lines 1 through 6:

- (b) Every individualized education program or section 504 plan for an eligible blind student shall include results of the initial or most recent assessments of an eligible blind student's reading and writing ability and needs for braille educational services, including the student's current and future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille.

In reference to Section 302A-C Braille Educational Services, the Department suggests the following revisions to ensure the documentation aligns with the IDEA requirements.

On page 6, lines 7 through 21, and page 7, lines 1 through 6:

- (d) ~~If the individualized education program team decides that braille literacy instruction is not necessary-~~ If consideration of the initial or most recent assessments support a determination by the section 504 plan team or IEP team that braille instruction or braille instructional

materials are not appropriate for the student, that determination shall be documented in the section 504 plan or individualized education program. for an eligible blind student in accordance with subsection Supporting documentation the student's individualized education program shall include:

~~(1) Document the student's:~~

~~(A) Visual condition, including cause, visual acuity, field of vision, visual functioning over time, stability of the condition, and prognosis; and (1) The student's visual functioning behaviors and skills in school, including ocular motor function, near and distance vision, and field of vision;~~

~~(B) Ability to achieve at least grade level reading and writing proficiency without regard to the use of braille, as expected of the student's peers of comparable ability to learn and progress from grade to grade in school;~~

~~(2) Identify the literacy assessment tools and methods used; Results of reading and writing skills and media assessments, identifying the assessment tools and methods used;~~

~~(3) Evaluate the student's current and future needs for braille instruction and braille instructional materials; and Evaluation results of the student's current and future needs for Braille instruction and the use of Braille;~~

~~(4) Identification of all accommodations and services provided to meet the student's reading and writing needs resulting from the student's low vision or blindness; and~~

~~(4) Provide the date of the student's next literacy assessment, if one is to be conducted, not to exceed twelve months from the previous assessment." (5) The date of any new assessment agreed upon by the IEP team.~~

The Department suggests revisions to the verbiage relating to ensuring that each eligible blind student is registered with the Department of Human Services under section 347-6. This delineates that the Department of Human Services registers persons who are blind or likely to become blind.

To clarify inter-agency responsibilities, the verbiage on page 8, lines 1 through 11, should be revised as follows:

~~(4) Ensure that each eligible blind student is registered with the department of human services pursuant to section 347-6; Cooperate with the department of human services when requested to submit information necessary to maintain a register of the blind in the State pursuant to section 347-6;~~

~~(5) For each student registered pursuant to paragraph (4), provide Provide the parent or legal guardian and, as appropriate, the student with comprehensive information about braille literacy instruction, braille instructional materials, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including tools and options available to assess the student's braille literacy needs; and~~

If enacted, this legislation would require an appropriation to sustain the Department's efforts to provide highly specialized experts, instructional materials, and dedicated full-time employees to support statewide coordination and guidance in carrying out the Braille Literacy Resource Center's

functions. While the Department is currently funding existing braille educational services and is committed to these efforts, additional recurring funds of \$300,000 annually would be necessary to maintain the center's operations effectively.

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

Testimony of Katie Keim

Senate Education Committee (EDU)

Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

March 10, 2025, 3:00 pm, hearing on HB620 H.D. 1

Good afternoon, Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members. My name is Katie Keim, proudly supporting HB620 H.D. 1, and urging an S.D. 1 amendment to substitute the text of SB530 S.D. 1.

Blindness came to me suddenly as a fully sighted adult, print had been my only reading and writing format until I was 36 years old. The power of braille allowing me to continue to be successful in a career and life, organize, take notes, read and continue to hold a professional job, became quickly apparent as a need not a luxury.

As a member of the NFB of Hawaii, I have worked alongside parents of blind children advocating for the need to learn braille early on which enables the child to keep up or excel in their interests and schoolwork. Even if a child has some residual vision, often during their IEP, this overruled them learning braille. Imagine having to read and write using a 42-point text or larger? A child early on can easily learn the system of reading and writing braille but not as easily later in life as they struggle to keep up with their lessons let alone once enrolled in higher education and a career.

I support and stand on the testimony submitted by the NFB of Hawaii. I appreciate the efforts made by Department of Education staff in working constructively with NFB of Hawaii on the text of a bill to bring to the legislature, thanking in particular Ms. Jamia Green, administrator of DOE's special needs section, and Ms. Haruka Hopper, educational specialist, exceptional support branch.

Mahalo for your support in passing HB620 with an S.D. 1 amendment, preferring the Senate text.

HB-620-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/8/2025 8:24:36 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/10/2025 3:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| Marie Kouthoofd | Individual | Support | In Person |

Comments:

Testimony in Support of HB 620 HD1: Braille Literacy for Students K-12

Good afternoon Chair Vice Chair, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of HB 620 HD1, which ensures that blind and low-vision students in grades K-12 receive proper assessment, Braille instruction if needed, and access to a Braille resource center where they can obtain the materials necessary for success.

Diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa at age seven, I was informed that my vision would progressively worsen over time. Despite this prognosis, I was not offered Braille instruction because I retained some vision—a decision that left me unprepared as my sight diminished. By age 24, my vision had deteriorated significantly. I could no longer drive and faced the challenges of blindness without the essential tool of Braille literacy. Despite seeking assistance, I was repeatedly told Braille wasn't necessary until complete vision loss—a misconception that hindered my adaptation.

Had I learned Braille at an early age, even though I may not have needed it immediately, I could have transitioned between visual and tactile reading modalities as my vision declined. This flexibility would have allowed me to maintain a competitive edge alongside both my sighted and blind peers. It also would have spared me from immense visual strain, pain, and frustration. Without Braille, I was forced to work significantly harder just to keep up, creating unnecessary gaps in my education. These gaps didn't stem from a lack of ability but rather from a lack of access to the right tools at the right time, making it more difficult for me to progress at the same pace as my peers.

Now, as an adult, I recognize the struggles and gaps in my education that resulted from not learning Braille. Although I eventually learned Braille later in life, I fear I will never be as proficient as those who had the opportunity to start at a young age. The difference in fluency is a stark reminder of why Braille instruction should never be delayed.

HB 620 HD1 ensures that blind and low-vision students receive the assessments they need to determine if Braille is the right path for them, guarantees instruction for those who need it, and

establishes a Braille resource center so that students have the necessary materials to learn and succeed.

Blindness already comes with enough challenges, please, help us empower the future of blind children by not adding illiteracy to the mix.

Thank you for receiving my testimony.

Marie Kouthoofd

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Senate Education Committee (EDU)

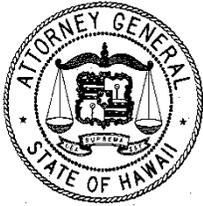
Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

March 10, 2025, 3:00 pm, hearing on HB620 H.D. 1

Good afternoon, Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the NFB of Hawaii, proudly supporting HB620 H.D. 1, and urging an S.D. 1 amendment to substitute the text of SB530 S.D. 1.

I support and stand on the testimony submitted by the NFB of Hawaii. I appreciate the efforts made by Department of Education staff in working constructively with NFB of Hawaii on the text of a bill to bring to the legislature, thanking in particular Ms. Jamia Green, administrator of DOE's special needs section, and Ms. Haruka Hopper, educational specialist, exceptional support branch.

Mahalo for your support in passing HB620 with an S.D. 1 amendment, preferring the Senate text.



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-THIRD LEGISLATURE, 2025**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 620, H.D. 1, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

BEFORE THE:

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

DATE: Monday, March 10, 2025

TIME: 3:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 229

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi or Randall M. Wat, Deputy Attorneys General

Chair Kidani and Members of the Committee:

The Department of the Attorney General (Department) provides the following comments.

The bill: establishes State policy to promote Braille literacy for eligible blind students; requires the individualized education programs (IEPs) and section 504 plans of eligible blind students to include the assessment and evaluation of eligible blind students' reading and writing abilities, instruction of Braille, and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances; requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center; and appropriates funds.

New section 302A-C(b) on page 5, lines 1 through 6, of the bill states:

(b) Every individualized education program or section 504 plan for an eligible blind student shall include an assessment of an eligible blind student's reading and writing ability and needs for braille educational services, including the student's current and future needs for instruction in braille or the use of braille.

Eligible student assessments are determined by an IEP team, including parents. Mandating yearly assessments in those areas is contrary to federal law, which leaves that determination to the IEP teams. See 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(1)(iii) (in developing each child's IEP, the IEP team must consider, amongst other things, the results of the initial or most recent evaluation of a child), and 34 C.F.R. § 300.324(a)(2)(iii) (in the case of a child who is blind or visually impaired, provide for instruction in Braille and the

use of Braille unless the IEP team determines, after an evaluation of the child's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media (including an evaluation of the child's future needs for instruction in Braille or the use of Braille), that instruction in Braille or the use of Braille is not appropriate for the child.). Consequently, the Department recommends removing new section 302A-C(b) on page 5, lines 1 through 6.

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

Testimony of Donald Sakamoto

Senate Education Committee (EDU)

Thirty-third legislature, 2025 regular session

March 10, 2025, 3:00 pm, hearing on HB620 H. D. 1

Good Afternoon Chair, Vice Chair, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, testifying to support HB620 H.D. 1, in promoting Braille literacy for low vision and blind students in K-12 education.

HB620 H. D. 1, declares a” pro-active Braille literacy approach and policy for our state, which is truly much needed and long overdue.

This bill has lots of powerful words, saying blind people, and particularly blind keiki matter to the legislature and our people in the Aloha State. Literacy education is fundamental to success in life. When we're blind, our literacy toolbox must include strong braille reading and writing skills. HB620 H. D. 1 truly affirms this understanding.

Many years ago, a blind friend of mine named Terrence Tom learned how to read braille at a young age and became a successful attorney and served on the Hawaii House of representative 48 District for some many years.

We truly need to prepare in having this bill to proceed on to allow our blind students to have the same opportunities that Terrence Tom experienced. Famous “by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” by Benjamin Franklin.

Thank you so much for allowing me to testify on this important bill.

National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii
Testimony submitted by James Gashel, legislative chair

Senate Education Committee (EDU)
Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

March 10, 2025, 3:00 pm, hearing on HB620 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chair Kidani, Vice Chair Kim, and members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, proudly supporting HB620 H.D. 1, and urging an S.D. 1 amendment to substitute the text of SB530 S.D. 1. Thank you for considering this important bill and for scheduling this hearing. HB620 H.D. 1 declares a proactive Braille literacy approach and policy for our state, which is much needed and long overdue.

This bill has lots of powerful words, saying blind people, and particularly blind keiki matter to the legislature and our people in the Aloha State. Literacy education is fundamental to success in life. When we're blind, our literacy toolbox must include strong Braille reading and writing skills. HB620 HD 1 affirms this understanding.

You held a hearing on SB530, which is basically the Senate version of HB620, the bill passed by the House. NFB of Hawaii appreciates chair Kidani's sponsorship of the Senate version of this bill on Braille literacy.

We also appreciate the efforts made by Department of Education staff in working constructively with NFB of Hawaii on the text of a bill to bring to the legislature, thanking in particular Ms. Jamia Green, administrator of DOE's special needs section, and Ms. Haruka Hopper, educational specialist, exceptional support branch. Through our combined efforts I'm pleased to say we all agree on the need for a law on Braille literacy in K-12 education, and we also agree on what the bill ought to say. That's real progress.

This brings me to our recommendation to replace the text of HB620 H.D. 1 with the text of SB530 S.D. 1, the bill you approved on February 7, 2025. This is the version of the Braille literacy bill that both NFB of Hawaii and the Department of Education support. We feel that the bill as presented in SB530 S.D. 1 is best suited for the Department to implement, and NFB of Hawaii supports their preference for the bill as amended in SB530 S.D. 1.

Speaking on behalf of NFB of Hawaii and our blind keiki members too, I am proud to ask you to support and pass HB620 with an S.D. 1 amendment, preferring the Senate text. Standing up for literacy is never the wrong thing to do. Please affirm this value for the blind people in our state today and tomorrow. Mahalo for your consideration and help to bring this bill closer to enactment this year.

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'OKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
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
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 9, 2025

TO: The Honorable Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 620 HD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.**

Hearing: March 10, 2025, 3:00 p.m.
Conference Room 229 & Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of this measure as it provides expanded educational and employment opportunities for students who are blind or low vision. DHS defers to the Department of the Attorney General and the Department of Education (DOE) on the preferred language and provides comments.

PURPOSE: This measure establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible blind students. Requires the individualized education programs and section 504 plans of eligible blind students to include the assessment and evaluation of eligible blind students' reading and writing abilities, instruction of braille, and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. Requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille Literacy Resource Center. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The Committee on Education amended this measure by:

(1) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000; and

- (2) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

Ho'opono Services for the Blind, a branch of the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), recognizes that reading and writing skills are essential for blind individuals who are seeking higher education and competitive, integrated employment. Notably, technology is not a replacement for literacy.

Ho'opono Services for the Blind works with blind and low vision individuals to teach many skills, such as orientation and mobility, home management, Braille, technology and other independent living skills, to prepare them for vocational training, higher education, and employment. Building skills and confidence in these areas contributes to our consumers' sense of independence and empowerment to become contributing members of their families and communities.

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

Brandon Young

3/8/2025

Testimony for HB 620HD1

Dear Chair Kidani and others,

My name is Brandon Young and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I want to thank Sen. Kidani for hearing our bill on braille literacy today. I am a blind person and I depend on the use of braille on a daily basis. I was a product of the Hawaii Department of Education system. We need to get braille in the hands of more blind children here in Hawaii. The passage of this bill would allow the Department of Education to do this. We feel that the language in the other bill was stronger and that you replace the current language of this bill with the language of the original Senate version. I hope that you would pass this bill. The passage of this bill will improve the lives of blind students in Hawaii. I thank you for your time and hearing this bill.

HB-620-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 11:35:30 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/10/2025 3:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Rodney Kouthoofd | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and members of the Education committee:

My name is Rodney Kouthoofd, and I am writing to express my strong support for Braille Literacy in Hawaii (HB620).

My wife is blind, and for the past thirty years I have witnessed firsthand the challenges she has faced as her blindness progressed. I've seen her struggle with headaches from straining to use her limited vision to read textbooks—both as a student and a professor—and the difficulty she faces simply trying to read labels on food containers.

Over the years, we've come to understand that children's brains are remarkably adaptable. We once believed it was too much for a child to learn multiple languages, but we now know that early exposure actually strengthens their cognitive development. This insight can extend to Braille. If we want the best outcomes for our children—both blind and sighted—we must equip them with the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly complex world.

Braille, a tactile system of reading and writing, should be part of every curriculum for blind children or those at risk of blindness. While it may seem daunting, learning basic Braille is not overly difficult, especially when introduced early. In fact, blind children who learn it at a young age are likely to grasp it as quickly as sighted children learn print.

Had my wife had the opportunity to learn Braille early on, her struggles would have been alleviated. But that is a lesson from the past, and now we must look forward. Our children here in Hawaii—both those who are blind and those who may face blindness in the future—deserve the best possible start in life.

I wholeheartedly support HB620 and encourage you to join in this important effort to enhance educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their vision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rodney Kouthoofd

HB-620-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/9/2025 2:46:26 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/10/2025 3:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Tabatha Mitchell | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha committee, I am Tabatha Mitchell. I live in Kane'ohe and am the mother of 3 Kalaheo High School graduates. Go Mustangs!

My youngest daughter, and most recent graduate, happens to be blind. She was born with a very rare genetic disorder that cause her rods & cones to die over time. She was likely born blind; but she was not diagnosed until she was 3 years old. At that time, her vision was already down to 20/800 with corrective lenses. For those that don't know 20/200 vision or worse in their better eye even when wearing corrective lenses is the legal definition of blind. A person may also be legally blind if their visual field is 20 degrees or less. She qualified on that note as well.

Plesse note that no one chooses to be blind. This is the hand that she was dealt, and most importantly, it can happen to anyone. Even you, your children, or your grandchildren. No one in our immediate or extended families have ever been blind.

However, when she was 3, we discovered that both dad & I were carriers of a single mutated gene that we, nor anyone else, knew about. When those two very tiny little mutated genes came together during reproduction, our offspring had a 1 in 4 chance of being blind from the disease-causing mutation. Eme is my 4th child, and she won the genetic lottery.

She won a lifetime of having to prove to everyone in all walks of life - in all places, that she is just another keiki. A little girl that just wanted to sleep in the loft like the other kids in daycare. Denied. She "needed" to stay at ground level. A little girl that just wanted to play on the monkey bars like the other kindergarteners. Denied. "She can't see the bars." A little girl that just wanted to read the same books as the other Kindergarteners in their Reading Room Program. Denied. "We don't have those books in Braille." An elementary school kid that just wanted to learn to use a dictionary like her fellow 2nd graders. Denied. "We don't have that in Braille." I can go on and on and on and on.

We KNEW she could do all of the things. We watched her climb trees & keep up and generally out do her sighted siblings. We all began to recognize that she was using non-visual skills that we could not only not recognize, but that we, her sighted family members, could not teach.

It was a fascinating realization.

After finding successful blind role models - ones that rode the bus and the light rail to work every day - we began to tune in to the art of possible.

Another fascinating realization. We needed the blind to teach the blind. We began to learn & recognize non-visual skills. We began to determine the tools she needed to be one of those tax paying fully independent completely blind citizens. Blindness was her certain future. We were told that she would likely lose most all of her vision by her late teens. They were right.

Eme is now down to only light detection in a very small section of her best eye. On some days, under just the right conditions, enough cells are still firing that she can catch a glimpse of a flash of light and she can sometimes detect shadows.

We were told to go home and love our child and prepare for her to be blind. We were told that she would likely be "mentally retarded" and would require a lifetime of care.

They were wrong. She's studying to be a Biochemist. Living independently in a dorm with her fellow-Freshman peers. Walking to classes through the heat and the rain. Meeting for meals in the cafeteria and talking about all of their daily woes and wins. Doing homework and writing papers. Discussing the latest book from her book club. She has classes on all floors of buildings. And over Thanksgiving Break, I heard she went to her first frat party.

I'd say she's swinging from the monkey bars.
Great parenting, yea?!

No. It's not great parenting.

It's Braille.

My daughter that happens to be blind graduated with academic honors and with CTE honors, and STEM honors because of Braille, and having accessible materials. Not because of great parenting. My job was just to make sure she had the materials that her classes were using - in her language - which is Braille.

This bill helps all blind keiki in Hawai'i. Every island. Every age. Every type of blindness. Every stage of blindness.

HB620 HD1 helps the DOE to identify where these kids are in their spectrum of vision loss, no matter when it sets in. HB620 HD1 helps DOE to help the parents and guardians of blind keiki by establishing and openly discussing a Braille Resource Center within DOE. Teaching a blind kid is not hard when you have the right tools in their language. Teachers and blind keiki must have their materials in their language at the same time as their peers. HB620 HD1 helps make that happen throughout the islands by building up understanding of Braille and the art of possible

for kids when they are included and are literate. Listening is not literacy. Remember that. Braille is their tactile method of reading & writing that is the equivalent of print to me & you & your kids. Help us get Braille to the blind keiki throughout Hawai'i by supporting HB620 HD1 and moving it forward.

Mahalo for the opportunity to share what I know is possible for every one of the blind keiki. Every single one can be a tax paying citizen that is part of communities of their choice. They simply need the right tools, and that starts with literacy - and that means they need Braille materials & instruction.

LATE



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION
KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

Monday, March 10, 2025

3:00 p.m.

Conference Room 308 & Videoconference
State Capitol, 415 South Beretania Street

To: COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Senator Michelle N. Kidani, Chair
Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Vice Chair

From: Dr. William J. Puette, Chair
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: H.B. 620 H.D. 1 Relating to Education

Testimony in SUPPORT

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5. HCRC enforces laws protecting the people of Hawai‘i from discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and in state and state-funded services.

The purpose of H.B. 620 H.D. 1 is to create a Braille literacy resource center and provide pro-activ Braille services for low vision and blind students attending department of education schools. Promoting literacy and opportunity for low vision and blind students through the provision of Braille educational services will serve to provide equal educational opportunities for students, allowing them and equal opportunity to participate in education and all of the positive benefits of literacy including life-satisfaction and self-esteem. Hawai‘i has long been a refuge of linguistic diversity and literacy. Higher rates of Braille literacy will serve to increase independence, inclusion, and diversity benefitting our whole community.

HCRC supports H.B. 620 H.D. 1.