

SB-530

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 9:23:05 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Louis Erteschik	Testifying for Hawaii Disability Rights Center	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Support

SB-530

Submitted on: 2/4/2025 4:42:33 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Michael	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I fully support this bill. The more Braille resources that the State can provide, the more educational achievements that Blind/Low Vision individuals can aspire to, and possibly achieve.

SB-530

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 8:26:12 AM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:05:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Lila Mower	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I support this measure.

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

February 5, 2025

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

The Honorable Senator Joy San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **SB 530 – RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.**

Hearing: February 7, 2025, 3:05 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 Education (DOE).

PURPOSE: This bill establishes Braille literacy as a policy of the State. Requires literacy assessments for eligible low vision and blind students to include Braille instruction and the use of Braille. Authorizes the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules. Establishes the Braille Literacy Resource Center. Appropriates funds.

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 and low vision individuals who are seeking higher education and competitive, integrated employment. Notably, technology is not a replacement for literacy.

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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.

National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii testimony

Submitted by James Gashel, legislative chair

Senate Education (EDU) and Health and Human Services (HHS) committees

Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

February 7, 2025, 3:05 pm, hearing on SB530

Good afternoon chairs, vice chairs, and members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, proudly supporting SB530. Thank you for considering this important bill and for scheduling this hearing.

SB530 declares a pro-active Braille literacy approach and policy for our state, which is much needed and long overdue. Thank you Chair Kidani for sponsoring this bill.

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. SB530 affirms this understanding.

This bill's provisions are the result of collaboration between DOE's knowledgeable staff, working with the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I think this collaboration is actually as important as the bill itself, strengthening prospects for a brighter future as this bill is implemented. To her credit, and reflecting her professionalism, Ms. Jamia Green, administrator of DOE's special needs section reached out to our group and said she'd like to pick up discussion of better Braille services, working from a bill in the legislature last year. This discussion led to many meetings in the summer and fall, finally resulting in text you've introduced as SB530 this year. DOE should speak for themselves, but NFB of Hawaii is convinced that passing SB530 will lead to improved Braille services in K-12 education in Hawaii.

Speaking on behalf of NFB of Hawaii and our blind keiki members too, I am proud to ask you to support and pass SB530. 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.

SB-530

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 7:43:32 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and committee members:

My name is Marie Kouthoofd, and I am writing to express my strong support for SB530, promoting Braille literacy for low-vision and blind students.

Diagnosed with Retinitis Pigmentosa at age seven, doctors informed my parents that my vision loss would begin with night blindness, followed by a loss of peripheral vision, and 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. Learning Braille early is crucial, as it takes advantage of the brain's neuroplasticity, facilitating more effective learning. Moreover, Braille assists in proper spelling; while sighted individuals visualize words in their minds, Braille readers use their fingers to feel the words, reinforcing correct spelling through tactile engagement.

Now, at age 60, I recognize the struggles and gaps in my education that resulted from not learning Braille. As a retired psychology professor, I understand firsthand how critical early learning is to long-term proficiency. I eventually learned Braille later in life, but 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.

SB530 ensures that children who are blind or visually impaired receive proper assessment, instruction, and access to Braille materials and the proper resources, providing them with the tools necessary for literacy and independence.

I urge you to support this bill to empower blind children with the resources they need to succeed.

Thank you for receiving my testimony.

Sincerely,

Marie Kouthoofd

SB-530

Submitted on: 2/5/2025 11:47:02 PM

Testimony for EDU on 2/7/2025 3:05:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Rodney Kouthoofd, and I am writing to express my strong support for Braille Literacy in Hawaii (SB530).

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 extends 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 SB530 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

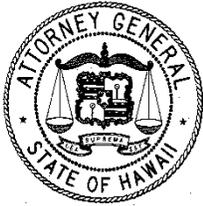
Brandon Young

2/5/2025

Testimony on SB530

Dear Chair and Vice Chair,

My name is Brandon Young and I am submitting testimony on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii for SB530. I am submitting testimony in favor of this bill. The blindness community is in favor of this bill. The short of the story is that blind children in Hawaii are not getting proper braille training. This type of services do not happen with regular children in our education and it should not happen to blind children. This bill would improve the level of braille training that is provided in Hawaii. The Department of Education was consulted in the drafting of this bill and are in support of the measure. I urge you pass this bill and that the blind children of Hawaii get the proper level of education of which they deserve. Thank you for your time on this measure. Have a wonderful day.



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

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:
S.B. NO. 530, RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

BEFORE THE:
SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DATE: Friday, February 7, 2025 **TIME:** 3:05 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

Chairs Kidani and San Buenaventura and Members of the Committees:

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

The bill establishes Braille literacy as a policy of the State; requires literacy assessments for eligible low vision and blind students to include Braille instruction and the use of Braille; authorizes the Department of Education (DOE) to adopt administrative rules; establishes the Braille Literacy Resource Center; and appropriates funds.

Eligible student assessments are determined by an Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, including parents. Mandating yearly assessments in those areas could be subject to challenge on the grounds that it 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.). For example, if a student requires and is provided Braille reading and writing

instruction in his/her IEP, the IEP team will be in the best position to know, based on individual monitoring and progress reports created by the special education teacher, whether the student has mastered those skills or requires additional instruction. The need for new assessments and evaluations is determined by the IEP team on an annual basis and is based on the student's progress reports.

Section 2 of this bill proposes to add to chapter 302A, HRS, a new part, "Braille Services," consisting of four new sections. In light of the applicable federal regulations, the Department suggests amending the third new section's subsection (b) on page 5, line 20, through page 6, line 4, and the third new section's subsection (e) on page 7, line 7, through page 8, line 8, as follows:

(b) Any section 504 plan and individualized education program, prepared for a low vision or blind student shall include results of **the initial or most recent** assessments of 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.

.....

(e) The section 504 plans or individualized education programs, as appropriate, prepared for low vision or blind students, shall provide Braille instruction and Braille instructional materials in accordance with subsections (c) and (d) ~~;~~ ~~provided that, on an individual basis, the~~ **If consideration of the initial or most recent** assessments required under subsection (b) 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.** Supporting documentation shall include: . . .

(5) The date of ~~[the next assessments to be made under subsection (b)-]~~ **any new assessments agreed upon by the IEP team.**

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



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

Date: 02/07/2025

Time: 03:05 PM

Location: CR 229 & Videoconference

Committee: Senate Education

Senate Health and Human Services

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Bill Title: SB 0530 RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes Braille literacy as a policy of the State. Requires literacy assessments for eligible low vision and blind students to include Braille instruction and the use of Braille. Authorizes the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules. Establishes the Braille Literacy Resource Center. Appropriates funds.

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i State Department of Education (Department) supports SB 530, which establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible low-vision and blind students, requires their individualized education programs (IEP) and Section 504 plans to include assessment and evaluation of their reading and writing abilities, instruction of braille, and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances, and establishes a Braille Literacy Resource Center.

The Department supports the goal of promoting braille literacy instruction. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act §300.324(a)(2)(iii), IEP teams are required to provide braille instruction unless an evaluation determines it is not appropriate. Schools are required to monitor student progress, conduct necessary assessments, and review educational plans at least annually to ensure low vision and blind students can access the general education curriculum.

As of September 2024, reports indicated that 17 students were receiving braille instruction. While this number does not reflect all braille service, including students receiving braille materials and those who are pre-readers or symbolic readers developing prerequisite skills for braille instruction, the Department acknowledges both the need and the potential for growth.

The Department recognizes that beyond providing braille services, SB 530 presents a vital

opportunity to enhance braille literacy education holistically by supporting families, educators, and community members through the Braille Literacy Resource Center. This initiative ensures students receive quality braille services while benefiting from a support system that fosters long-term success. Additionally, it would serve as a comprehensive resource that expands training programs and community outreach, ensuring students receive the necessary support at every stage of their education.

If enacted, this legislation would require additional appropriations to support the Department's efforts to ensure that highly specialized experts, materials, financial resources, and dedicated full-time employees, essential for statewide coordination and guidance, are provided to carry out the Braille Literacy Resource Center's functions. While the Department is currently funding existing braille services and is committed to these efforts, additional recurring funds in the amount of \$300,000 would be necessary to maintain the center's operations effectively, provided that it does not affect the priorities identified in the Department's Governor-approved budget.

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

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Senate Education (EDU) and Health and Human Services (HHS) committees

Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

February 7, 2025, 3:05 pm, hearing on SB530

Good afternoon chairs, vice chairs, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, a blind businessman and President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii supporting SB530. Mahalo for considering this important bill and for scheduling this hearing.

I am in strong support of the testimony submitted by James Gashel for the NFB of Hawaii.

Please support and pass SB530 and in doing so, support the literacy and future of our blind children. Mahalo for your consideration.

Testimony of Katie Keim

Senate Education (EDU) and Health and Human Services (HHS) committees

Thirty-third Legislature, 2025 regular session

February 7, 2025, 3:05 pm, hearing on SB530

Good afternoon chairs, vice chairs, and members. My name is Katie Keim, a blind businesswoman and leader in the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii supporting SB530. Mahalo for considering this important bill and for scheduling this hearing.

I am in strong support of the testimony submitted by James Gashel for the NFB of Hawaii.

As an advocate and independent consultant worked in my past directly with some of the parents during their children's IEP's and our blind youth in the public schools. I have seen the impact with children that are blind or low vision, when braille is not given as a tool for their quality educational future. I have also worked directly with some of the same children later in life when they came to Ho'opononui needing adult blindness skills training, including braille. It breaks my heart to see what they lost that could have been gained with braille being taught to them as a child. It became much harder for them as young adults to pursue higher education or jobs without braille as their mode of reading and writing.

SB530 is a long time coming to ensure our blind and low vision students receive the best in K-12 education to ensure a successful quality life and career as an adult.

Please support and pass SB530 and in doing so, support the literacy and future of our blind keiki. Mahalo for your consideration.



LATE

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)

February 7, 2025

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Senate Bill 530 – Relating to Braille Literacy

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports Senate Bill 530 – Relating to Braille Literacy.

This bill establishes Braille literacy as a policy of the State. It requires literacy assessments for eligible low vision and blind students to include Braille instruction and the use of Braille. It authorizes the Department of Education to adopt administrative rules. It establishes the Braille Literacy Resource Center, and appropriates funds.

Braille literacy is essential for students who are blind or have low vision to learn and post-graduation, obtain and maintain remunerative employment. Some students have vision which diminishes over time, and by the point the Department of Education decides Braille is appropriate the student is about to age out of the public school system. Senate Bill 530 ensures that the accommodation desires of the student are given primary consideration.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director