

Testimony of James Gashel

Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

April 4, 2023, 10:30 AM, hearing on HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870, H.D. 2, S.D.1, as approved by the HHS committee. Mahalo to the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward this year.

NFB of Hawaii appreciates the encouraging comments of the Department of Human Services (DHS). As noted in the HHS committee report, DHS recommends \$100,000 for contracted services, and \$93,000 for one position, as the amount needed for program planning and start-up. NFB of Hawaii supports this recommendation. In addition, if the DHS recommendation for one position is accepted, NFB of Hawaii requests the position be specified for the Neighbor Islands Blind and visually Impaired Services pilot program.

This is an important bill for anyone who is blind or anyone who becomes blind while living on our neighbor islands. Added to not seeing, Isolation is a major barrier. Most services for the blind are provided through the state's Ho'oponohu facility here on Oahu and not readily available to neighbor island residents unable to relocate to Oahu for several months of necessary training. The best help with independence and self-sufficiency is tied to a job goal; fine if you are 25 but not so fine if you are 75. We should do better by our neighbor island residents.

As found in the HHS committee report: "Your Committee finds that approximately two thousand neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired do not have access to or are ineligible for existing state and local support services, including training, adjustments to blindness services, and transportation. The Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program to be established pursuant to this measure will supplement existing statewide services and enable these individuals to receive the necessary training and other services that would enable them to have full and integrated lives in their communities."

A similar bill was considered last year which proposed a full-blown program. This bill does not. Passing this bill will allow a process to go forward whereby the Department will convene a working group with neighbor island residents to review the needs and plan a program to meet them. Then we will return to the legislature next year with a more detailed proposal. No one convincingly disputes that the state is falling short in offering convenient and needed blindness-related assistance to our neighbor island residents.

Enactment of HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1, will truly be a "win, win," proposition for the people of our state. The need on the neighbor islands is known and acknowledged. Building on the strength of services provided by the state on Oahu, we can and should do better for people who are blind or visually impaired who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed. Mahalo for your support to move this bill forward.

HB-870-SD-1

Submitted on: 3/31/2023 12:19:14 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/4/2023 10:30:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Cards Pintor	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,
I support this bill.
Mahalo nui,
Cards Pintor

Brandon Young

4/2/2023

Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

April 4, 2023, 10:30 AM, hearing on HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1

Dear Senator Dela Cruz and other committee members,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii and I am writing this testimony in support of HB 870 SD1. I am in support of this bill and would wish that your committee pass it forward as well. The program that this bill would support would help many blind people on the neighbor islands of our state.

The support of those who are blind and visually impaired in this state is very important to me because I am blind myself. I live here on Oahu and am able to enjoy the services that are available at the Ho`opono Services for the Blind Branch. At Ho`opono, there are the services of the New Visions program. This program gives blind and visually impaired important services such as orientation and mobility, braille training, technology training and cooking and other daily living skills. If you have to live on the neighbor islands, you are not able to enjoy many of those services. Blind and Visually impaired people on the neighbor islands do not have the ability to have rehabilitation teachers to come to their home and provide them wonderful services. This program, if supported, would provide certified blind people to be able to travel to the neighbor islands and to provide services to the several blind and visually impaired people on our neighbor islands. This would provide them many wonderful services that they do not currently enjoy by living on the neighbor islands. These services would allow these blind or visually impaired people the ability to live independent lives in the community that they live in. These services do not currently not exist and people have a hard time in living an independent life currently. I hope that you would consider this bill for passage. I want to thank you and your committee for consider this bill for decision making. Have a wonderful day.

Testimony of Hoku Burrows

Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

April 4, 2023, 10:30 AM, hearing on HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am Hoku Burrows, fully supporting HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1, as approved by the HHS committee. Mahalo to the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward this year.

I am a blind woman originally from Molokai, relocating to Oahu to support myself with resources including important independent peer mentoring, public transportation enabling me to fully participate in education, employment, volunteer and social activities rather than the life I had in a neighbor island, a blind woman in isolation. Now that I am in my 70's, it is more important for me to have public transportation to get to doctors, shopping, NFBH meetings for peer support, volunteer work I give my time to giving back to projects important to me, and so much more to stay healthy and full of living.

Too many of our blind and disabled peers living on any island except Oahu live that life I once had. With this bill, they could have peer mentoring and so many many more essential resources so important to each of us as blind people, giving them opportunity without leaving their home island.

I stand in strong support of the testimony submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

Mahalo nui loa for seriously considering and supporting this bill's passing.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Committee on Ways and Means (WAM)

Hawaii State Senate

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

April 4, 2023, 10:30 AM, hearing on HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, a blind businessman and the president of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i. I fully support HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1, as approved by the HHS committee. Mahalo to the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward this year.

As a local businessman and the president of the NFB of Hawai'i, I travel to our neighbor islands. Both for business and representing the NFB of Hawai'i, to support other blind individuals through mentoring, recommendations of local resources, offering choices of opportunities for good training, hope for a quality independent life and more.

Transportation, blind training, local resources are lacking in our neighbor islands, the most of which are in Oahu or elsewhere in our country. Personally, I end up relying on costly transportation when participating in business or NFBH meetings on our neighbor islands, yet currently I am successfully employed, most blind people especially on the neighbor islands do not have that choice or opportunity for good blindness training, education, or employment that can afford taxi's or rideshare transportation. Without good training, rural life is extremely isolating and fraught with limiting inaccessible to the blind not needed with opportunity of good blindness training. Isolation and ultimately a lack of confidence, even depression, for no reason other than the lack of access to the community due to no blindness skills training, or transportation from home to resources in their community.

HB870, H.D. 2, S.D. 1 is a long overdue support needed to augment and aid in the services to our neighbor island blind and low vision peers.

I stand in strong support of the testimony submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i.

Mahalo for considering and supporting this bill's passing.