

February 2015

Governor David Ige
State Capitol 5th Floor
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: Application to the Disability and Communication Access Board

Dear Governor Ige,

My name is Yolanda Phelan and I am interested in serving on the Disability and Communication Access Board. I was appointed as an Interim member in 2014 to replace another blind consumer but not confirmed by the Legislature. This is my request for a formal, 4-year term.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND: I am an Independent Blind Senior. I was born in the State of California and raised in Fremont, California. I graduated from Newark High, and MTI Business College. I moved to Hawaii 26 years ago. I was the first blind person to graduate from the Hawaii Woman's Business Center Small Business Planning and Marketing class which opened the doors for other blind persons to follow. I have an eye disease called Wet Macular Degeneration of the Retina. My blindness has been for 19 years. I am a certified Guide Dog Handler and used to use a guide dog for mobility. I am retired. Prior to my blindness I was an Art Consultant.

ACTIVITY IN THE BLIND COMMUNITY: I am on the Ho'opono State Rehabilitation Center for the Blind Advisory Board and have served two turns as Chair. I was awarded the Ho'opono 2005 Volunteer Person of the Year Award. I am active with the Hawaii Association of the Blind. In 2007, I was presented the Eva Smith Award by the Hawaii Association of the Blind for my contributions to the welfare and well being to the blind community. Currently I hold a seat on the Board of Directors for the Hawaii Association of the Blind, which is an Affiliate of the American Council of the Blind. I am also a member of the Hawaii Association of Parents of the Visually Impaired and serve as a mentor to blind and deaf-blind children. I am on Senator Suzanne Chun Oakland's Deaf/Blind Task Force.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS: I am interested in emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. I went to the FEMA Conference in Washington D.C. with four members of the Hawaii State Emergency Preparedness Planning Team. After that experience I knew I had to do whatever I could do to help others be prepared in an emergency. I am certified to give "Emergency Preparedness Feeling Safe Being Safe" workshops to our community and provide training to members of our community who have functional needs and who live alone, are aging, have disabilities or who may need additional support in an emergency. The Disability Communication Access Board and State Civil Defense have inspired me to reach out and educate other people in our community, blind or not blind, on the importance of being prepared for emergencies. It

is the right thing to do, I know for a fact because of our last tsunami experience I was prepared because of a presentation that I attended by Civil Defense and I welcome the opportunity to share with others how to be prepared too. This is how I became involved in becoming a Certified Emergency Preparedness Host Trainer.

BUSINESS AND OUTREACH: Due to my personal experiences I realize that there is a misconception that the sighted community has about blindness. At times at work or in the public sector the sighted community lacks the knowledge or education on how to communicate with persons, who are blind or have limited vision, and because of this I developed a strong passion for outreach. Therefore, it is my intention to bridge this gap. So I started my own business called Sharper Senses. Sharper Senses provides customized sensitivity training to management and staff for restaurants, hotels, shops, airports or any business that provides service to the public. I have given outreach presentations on blind awareness to the public, in addition to educating over 600 cab drivers on sensitivity training to people with disabilities, sighted guide techniques, safety tips, guide dog etiquette, and ADA laws.

In 2007, I began volunteering in the sensitivity training program for Paratransit (Handi-Van) new drivers and The CAB. For the past two years I have served on the Oahu Metropolitan Planning Organization (OMPO) Advisory Board and serve on the CAC Transportation Committee.

GOALS: Since I am a consumer of businesses and transportation, I would like to be on the Disability and Communication Access Board.

- Advocating for issues that affect safety and access in our community,
- Educating communities on Blind Awareness,
- Offering emergency preparedness training to seniors and people with disabilities.

I want to make things better today for tomorrow.

Sincerely,

Yolanda Phelan

