

**SR-4**

Submitted on: 3/13/2020 5:05:46 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2020 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Karen Kojima	Individual	Comments	No

Comments:

I am submitting testimony in opposition of Senate Resolution 4 which mandates that teachers of the visually impaired in the Hawaii DOE teach blind children using only the structured discovery method.

I have been a mobility instructor for over 25 years and have successfully trained my students in white cane travel and orientation. The Department of Education should use a variety of methodologies to suit individual students' needs and should not be forced to use only one methodology for all students. The Individualized Education Plan should address individual students' needs and the unique way in which each child learns. We do not, as teachers use only one methodology to teach any other subject, and it should be the same for orientation and mobility.

Also, it is not ethical for a state, public agency to be partisan to one consumer group and their philosophy. Besides, the National Federation of the Blind is largely made up of adults who lost their vision later in life and do not have formal training in education and child development.

Furthermore, as a mobility instructor, young children need to learn the basic mechanics of orientation and cane travel. As teachers, we integrate a variety of strategies including problem-solving and discovery methods.

Therefore, I am in opposition to SR4.

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

Karen Kojima

**SR-4**

Submitted on: 3/14/2020 6:45:50 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2020 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Stacie Fong	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Hi! I'm a parent of a blind 1st grader at Waikiki Elementary and I cannot express how much this needs to be implemented in our current education system! When my daughter was just transitioning to preschool, I had an independent assessment by an NOMC certified structure and discovery teacher done for her to best shape her IEP. It only made the most sense to me at the time to look to the "experts" who were blind themselves. Who better than them to educate my daughter on what skills she will need in life to get around in the way only they know best?

Please join me in supporting this bill, really keeping the best interest of blind children like my daughter at the forefront of her educational needs.

**SR-4**

Submitted on: 3/15/2020 11:43:21 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2020 3:00:00 PM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Present at Hearing</b>
Tabatha Mitchell	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

I am a resident of Kaneohe & live at 44-547 Kaneohe Bay Drive in unit A.

I have 3 kids in the Hawaii public school system. My youngest daughter that happens to be blind is an eighth grade honor student at Kailua Intermediate School. I am asking you to support SCR5 / SR4 to accept NOMC certification for mobility teachers of blind children in Hawaii.

Just yesterday I watched the difference between NOMC & COMS certification in action at Pearl Harbor as my daughter & I participated with a group of blind adults that were assembled to improve the Pearl Harbor experience for blind patrons.

I did very very little sighted guide, which is a physically connected guiding technique, with my daughter, EmÄ“, throughout the day, It was a relatively large group, and being aware of stricter discovery methods, I naturally pulled out ahead of the group to Marshall at entrances, which means I verbally identified entrances. I realized that the DOE TVI in the group seemed surprised by my group marshaling & EmÄ“s structured discovery independent travel. Being new to Hawaii & Hawaii DOE, I thought it was prudent that she embrace that structured discovery mobility methods was how we train & have worked with Eme.

There was non-stop sighted guide for most participants throughout the day. And a whole lot of non-stop verbal step-by-step cuing for everyone."Step up Go left three steps. Etc".

I know that people come into blindness at all different places of loss and at various points in life, and I am not judging the skill levels or ability of others in the group to travel independently with a cane. But I know where & when EmÄ“ has had what training and I

know what certifications her trainers have had. I am a sighted parent raising a 13 year old blind daughter among 5 sighted children. We can all see the difference in her skills and capabilities when she is in any group of blind kids & adults. Yesterday was no different.

Eme simply moved so much more independently.

I know that is because she has been trained with structured discovery NOMC methods since diagnosed as blind at 3. I wish I could explain how just 2 weeks to train with blind cane instructors at CCB certified under NOMC elevated her ability. It should be common sense that capable & qualified blind people are ideal teachers of blind skills.

I wish the capabilities that come from being trained under an instructor certified under NOMC were easy to illustrate. The difference is very real. And it is very real stuff. Independent travel is what will enable my daughter to be an active working tax payer in Hawaii. A recipient of training under both certifications for the past 10 years, I would chose a NOMC certified blind instructor teaching structured discovery for my blind child any day of the week. Unfortunately, within Hawaii DOE as it currently stands, we do not have that choice.

Please let me know if there is any way we can help you with your endeavor to expand the training options for blind kids in Hawaii.

**LATE**

**SR-4**

Submitted on: 3/15/2020 7:34:54 PM  
Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2020 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Justin Salisbury	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

Aloha, Chairs Kidani and Ruderman, and Members of the Committees:

Mahalo for bringing these resolutions to a hearing. I am hopeful that we can eventually have these resolutions adopted by the full Senate and find the House concurring. I am delighted to know that my friends Shellford Cantan, Dean Georgiev, Katie Keim, and Jim Gashel will be attending the hearing to answer questions.

I was recently a government employee in a job where I taught blind teenagers and adults to travel safely and independently. I enjoyed this job, and I was extremely grateful that this government agency was willing to hire me as a blind person to do the job that involved teaching other blind people how to walk with a cane. Unfortunately, my experience with the Hawaii Department of Education gives me no evidence that they are willing to do the same. If the DOE argues that they have one token blind person who “teaches” orientation and mobility, I would encourage the Committees to ask how long it has been since she actually taught orientation and mobility.

Last year, with similar resolutions, I felt as if the DOE attempted to frame this resolution as saying that the NOMC would be substituted for K-12 teacher licensure. I don’t think that was ever attempted. If someone wants to be a full-time DOE teacher whose duties include teaching orientation and mobility, then such a job requires teaching licensure and a certification for orientation and mobility. Currently, the only certification approved by the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board is the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist (COMS). Orientation and mobility services can be provided by an in-house teacher who has the right certification or an external contractor who has the right certification, just like many other disability-related interventions. Friends of mine with full teaching licensure and the NOMC have applied for jobs in the DOE and have never been interviewed.

One of the major issues here is the fact that the NOMC was created specifically because blind people were told for decades that they were not allowed to receive the COMS. First, it was an outright block against blind applicants. Once it became no longer politically viable to do that, there became a functional visual requirement, such as requiring that people could monitor what the student was doing from 400 feet away. This was a way of making the certification off-limits to blind people without technically saying that blind people were being excluded. Logically, if a sighted teacher is 400 feet away from a student and sees that they are in a situation requiring the teacher's intervention, there is almost nothing that the teacher can do besides perhaps blasting an air horn. What would the value of that be? It was purely to discriminate against blind people. To this day, there is still rampant discrimination against blind people in the process of seeking the COMS certification, which is one of the reasons why I have never attempted to earn it myself. The NOMC had to be created so that blind people could have a nondiscriminatory path to certification to provide orientation and mobility services. Since the current system in the DOE requires applicants to go through a discriminatory certification process in order to provide orientation and mobility services, the DOE is functionally discriminating against blind applicants for jobs providing orientation and mobility services.

Some of this comes from an obsolete idea that the job of the orientation and mobility specialist is to visually assess and interpret a travel environment, then tell the blind student what information they obtained visually and program the blind person to be able to navigate that specific setting. When the blind person wants to go a new setting, they can just call an orientation and mobility specialist and ask for the person to go assess and interpret that new setting and program them once again. It leads to endless job security for the instructor and a life of dependency for the blind person.

Every day, at Ho`opono and across the country, NOMC instructors are proving that obsolete idea to be false. Completely blind instructors can effectively teach blind students. Sighted instructors can do the job well, too, but only if they learn how to function nonvisually and immerse themselves in the social justice movement toward the full integration of blind people into society. The NOMC is available to both blind and sighted applicants and requires that teachers learn the common-sense techniques for teaching blind students plus develop an understanding of the real problem of blindness. The real problem of blindness is not the lack of eyesight, but the low expectations and misperceptions which exist in society. Orientation and mobility instructors must work to raise the expectations of blind people because the low expectations are the obstacles between blind students and their dreams. This is difficult to do when the process of becoming an orientation and mobility instructor is so discriminatory.

Last year, the DOE argued that they did not have any shortage of qualified teachers to provide the orientation and mobility services. I was in shock. A major goal of orientation and mobility services is teaching a student to reach a level where they can go wherever they want, whenever they want, however they want, with minimal inconvenience to themselves or others, as effectively as their sighted peers. I have never encountered any blind students in the DOE who could do that, except maybe one student who spent a lot of time with NOMC instructors outside of school. If we had NOMC teachers in the DOE and gave them the autonomy to teach the students properly, the travel skills of blind students would change fundamentally.

In 2019, at the Oahu County Convention of the Democratic Party of Hawaii, a resolution was adopted with this similar stance, and I have attached it here.

Mahalo for considering this important resolution.

Justin Mark Hideaki Salisbury, MA, NOMC, NCRTB, NCUEB

**OC 2019-8. Urging the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to Accept the National Orientation and Mobility Certification for Teachers Providing Orientation and Mobility Services**

Whereas, The Department of Education (DOE) has perennially struggled to fill vacancies for teachers of blind students or teachers of the visually impaired positions, including positions providing specialized instruction in orientation and mobility; and

Whereas, Blind children in Hawai'i end up being underserved with regard to orientation and mobility within the DOE, reducing their opportunity to participate equally and meaningfully with their sighted peers and build their capacity to contribute to their communities; and

Whereas, For the teaching of orientation and mobility, the DOE currently only has instructors holding the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist certification from the

Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals, an international certification with a long history of refusing certification to blind instructors; and

Whereas, The DOE currently has no employees who hold the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NBPCB), a domestic certification initially developed specifically to offer a non-discriminatory credentialing process; and

Whereas, The Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board currently does not accept the NOMC offered by the NBPCB, rendering the DOE unable to provide Structured Discovery Cane Travel, a service which can only be provided by a professional certified by the NBPCB; and

Whereas, Requiring instructors to succeed in a discriminatory certification process reinforces systemic discrimination against them; and

Whereas, When parents of blind children needing Structured Discovery Cane Travel request it as a service on their Individualized Education Plans, they are consistently told that the DOE is unable to provide this service, thus leaving their blind child without sufficient services to travel safely and independently; and

Whereas, For decades, Structured Discovery Cane Travel has been empowering blind children and adults across the United States, helping them build confidence and feelings of self-respect as they navigate their world safely and without shame about their blindness; and

Whereas, the United States Department of Education recognized the validity of the National Orientation and Mobility Certification in its 2004 Institute on Rehabilitation Issues Report; and

Whereas, The NOMC from the NBPCB is already accepted by the Hawai'i Division of Vocational Rehabilitation in order to provide orientation and mobility services, where, in fact, all current providers of orientation and mobility services are blind adults certified by the NBPCB; and

Whereas, The Hawai'i State Legislature, House of Representatives, Thirtieth Legislature of the State of Hawai'i, Regular Session of 2019, Committees on Lower and Higher Education (LHE) and Labor & Public Employment (LAB) passed H.C.R. No 192, HD1, requesting the Hawai'i teacher standards board to accept the national orientation and mobility certification for teachers providing orientation and mobility services, but it did not receive a hearing by the Finance Committee; and

Whereas, The DOE, in its testimony, expressed appreciation of the intent of HCR No 192, HD1, but did not support the resolution, noting that, "Licensing and permit requirements for teachers in the state of Hawai'i are governed by the Hawai'i Teacher

Standards Board. This board is the entity that sets professional and performance standards for licensing, which includes a teaching field in Special Education Orientation and Mobility."; therefore be it

*Resolved*, That the O'ahu County Democrats of the Democratic Party of Hawai'i urges the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board to accept the National Orientation and Mobility Certification from the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, the same way that it accepts the Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist certification from the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals, for teachers providing orientation and mobility services within the DOE, thus expanding opportunities for qualified teachers to serve blind *keiki* and reducing discrimination against blind teachers of orientation and mobility in the Department; and be it

*Ordered*, That copies of this resolution shall be transmitted to the Office of the Governor, the Lieutenant Governor, the Chairperson of the Board of Education, the Superintendent of the Department of Education, the Chair of the Hawai'i Teacher Standards Board, the Administrator of the Hawai'i Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services for the Blind Branch (*Ho'opono*), the President of the National Blindness Professional Certification Board, the President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, and the President of the Hawai'i Association of the Blind.

**LATE**

**SR-4**

Submitted on: 3/15/2020 7:43:24 PM  
Testimony for EDU on 3/16/2020 3:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Present at Hearing
Rachel-Star Brandt	Individual	Support	No

Comments:

NATIONAL FEDERATION OF THE BLIND OF HAWAII

Testimony Before The Senate Committee on Human Services (HMS) and the Senate Committee on Education (EDU)

State of Hawaii

Thirtieth Legislature

Regular Session of 2020

March 16, 2020, 3:00 PM hearing on SCR5 / SR4

Good afternoon committee chairs, vice chairs, and members. My name is Rachel Awa. I live in Ewa Beach, Hawaii.

I am testifying today on behalf of the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii, asking for your affirmative vote to pass these resolutions; SCR5 / SR4. These are identical resolutions to ask the Hawaii Teacher Standards Board to accept (or recognize) the National Orientation and Mobility Certification (NOMC) as a professional qualification for teachers of the blind and visually impaired here in Hawaii.

NOMC is a credentialing process administered by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. Aside from NOMC, the other credential available is called Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist, or COMS, administered by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals. At present the Department of Education here in Hawaii recognizes COMS but not NOMC.

In asking you to pass SCR5 / SR4, the principle we are following here is inclusion, not exclusion. In short, we are not asking you to pick sides between NOMC and COMS. All we are asking is for the Teacher Standards Board to consider recognizing teachers and teacher candidates who possess either the NOMC or the COMS credential. At this point I should note that recognizing both NOMC and COMS is consistent with the policy of the Department of Human Services (DHS). Consequently, instructors or applicants for employment with DHS and the Services for the Blind branch called Ho'opono may hold either credential.

Others who will testify will explain the differences between NOMC and COMS, but the point is, we are not asking the state to choose; just allow both. Perhaps the best way to understand the difference would be just to look at the names of the organizations that administer the certificates.

In the case of NOMC, that certificate is awarded by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board. If you look at their website you find they don't hesitate to use the word "blind." The training methods they emphasize are referred to as "non-visual." In other words, teachers holding the NOMC credential can be expected to train their students to function effectively and efficiently without using any vision whatsoever.

On the other hand, the organization that awards the COMS credential is called Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals, carefully avoiding use of the word blind. This will be obvious if you search and compare its website. Note the use of the term "vision rehabilitation," or "vision education;" not "blindness education." The difference, emphasizing vision over blindness, is more than just a difference in terminology. Teachers who hold the COMS credential can be expected to emphasize use of a student's remaining vision in preference to teaching non-visual methods as compared to teachers who have the NOMC credential.

Aside from the difference in approach, emphasizing vision or blindness, you should note that failure by the state to recognize NOMC also tends to screen out blind people from being employed as teachers of blind or visually impaired students. In our experience this is so because most teachers who hold the COMS credential are people who can see, whereas NOMC is absolutely wide open to full acceptance of the blind. Consequently, exclusion of NOMC professionals has made it far less likely that qualified teachers who are blind will be employed in Hawaii to teach blind students.

If you pass these resolutions you don't need to take or express a position on which approach, "vision education," or "blindness education," is best. Our ask is, just don't exclude "blindness education." That is the point of these resolutions. Many states acknowledge and accept both approaches, as shown in the example from Louisiana attached.

Mahalo for bringing these resolutions to a hearing and for your kind attention to the issues they raise.

Louisiana rule

## **Chapter 4. Ancillary School Service Certificates**

### **§410 Orientation and Mobility**

A. Orientation and Mobility—Valid as long as holder maintains current licensure

1. Eligibility requirements:

a. Bachelor's or Master's degree with concentration in orientation and mobility earned at a regionally accredited college or university.

b. licensure issued by the Academy for Certification of Vision Rehabilitation & Educational Professionals (COMS); or

c. licensure issued by the National Blindness Professional Certification Board (NOMC).

**AUTHORITY NOTE:** Promulgated in accordance with R.S. 17:6 (A)(10), (11), (15); R.S. 17:7(6); R.S. 17:10; R.S. 17:22(6); R.S. 17:391.1-391.10; R.S. 17:411.

**HISTORICAL NOTE:** Promulgated by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, LR 32:1811 (October 2006), amended LR 34:433 (March 2008).

Aloha, Rachel Awa

