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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

February 6, 2023

TO: The Honorable Representative John M. Mizuno, Chair  
House Committee on Human Services

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 870 – RELATING TO THE NEIGHBOR ISLANDS BLIND AND VISUALLY  
IMPAIRED SERVICE PILOT PROGRAM.**

Hearing: February 9, 2023, 9:00 a.m.  
Conference Room 329 & Videoconference, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this bill and provides comments.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of the bill is to require the Department of Human Services (DHS) to establish and fund a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program and working group that supplements existing statewide services by providing training and other services to neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired.

DHS appreciates the opportunity to participate in a working group with the goal of supplementing necessary services for neighbor island residents who are blind and visually impaired.

DHS respectfully notes that services described in the measure are currently available statewide to eligible participants of our Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Services for the Blind Branch, Ho`opono. A number of the services are also provided by non-profit statewide centers for independent living. Additionally, assistive technology devices and

training are available via the State Grant for Assistive Technology, offered through the Assistive Technology Resource Center here in Hawaii.

DHS has concerns with the measure's language in Section 2 (f), which states: "The department shall enter into a contract with a non-profit organization to recruit, train, and supervise volunteer service corps members and to oversee the pilot program, provided that existing department personnel may be assigned to fulfill administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the pilot program." First, DHS currently does not have sufficient staff available to perform such a function for the proposed pilot program.

Second, if the measure passes, the department will need new positions and a general fund appropriation to perform these additional duties and maintain current responsibilities. Additionally, the federal funding requirements of the Vocational Rehabilitation and Independent Living Services for Older Blind grants would prevent DHS staff from working on services provided to individuals who are not eligible for our programs. Consequently, the proposed measure requires new 100% state general funded positions. The number of positions would need to be researched through departmental consultation with the working group.

DHS appreciates that any funds appropriated according to this proposed legislation shall be in addition to and shall not reduce or supplant any portion of the base budget for any state or county agency providing services for blind or visually impaired persons.

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



## DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

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February 9, 2023

### TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HUMAN SERVICES

#### House Bill 870 – Relating to the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports House Bill 870 – Relating to the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program. This bill would require the Department of Human Services to establish a neighbor islands blind and visually impaired service pilot program to provide training and other services to blind residents residing on the neighbor islands.

Equivalent programs and services are not available on the neighbor islands. The pilot program would establish a working group composed of neighbor island residents who are blind or visually impaired to provide recommendations regarding the establishment and implementation of training and services pilot program. Providing training, services and support to individuals who are blind and visually impaired on their respective island will improve their quality of life and independence.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW  
Executive Director

**HB-870**

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 12:12:49 PM

Testimony for HUS on 2/9/2023 9:00:00 AM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
james gashel	national federation of the blind of hawaii	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony of James Gashel

Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Committee on Human Services (HUS)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870. Much mahalo to representative Gregg Takayama and my representative, Bertrand Kobayashi, members of the Deaf and Blind Task Force, for including HB870 in the DBTF package and bringing this bill forward this year.

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'opono facility here on Oahu and not readily available to neighbor island residents unable to relocate to Oahu for several months. 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 last year's Senate committee report, SB2437\_SD1\_SSCR2088, "...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 existing communities.”

At its core this bill acknowledges the need for a supplemental services program for blind and visually impaired people who are neighbor island residents. The services authorized would not replace training at Ho'opono; quite the opposite. More than anything else, this bill would give neighbor island residents a pathway out of isolation. This bill means hope for better opportunities to enable blind and visually impaired people to improve their lives.

The bill includes a detailed list of services described as pier to pier outreach, sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, and mobility training. Nine specific services are authorized as follows:

- (1) Outreach efforts to identify individual and program needs;
- (2) Coordination with existing programs to ensure that existing services are identified and used to the maximum extent possible;
- (3) Adjustment services, including individual and group counseling;
- (4) Access to and training to use telecommunications services to receive current news, weather alerts, and other vital public information;
- (5) Awareness development and training for use of computers, smart phones, and other communications devices;
- (6) Daily living, self-care, and home management skills;
- (7) Orientation and mobility training;
- (8) Advocacy training and assistance to secure needed benefits, services, and individual rights; and
- (9) Other services, including peer support needed for program participants to sustain independence and social integration.

Support for transportation, referred to as "special needs transportation," would also be provided. This section recognizes the serious limitations faced by blind and visually impaired people who are unable to drive but live in areas where having access to and use of a vehicle is a necessity since public transportation is infrequent or often not available at all. nonetheless, support for

special needs transportation is intended to supplement and not replace any public transportation services available.

Regarding the nine services listed as outreach and training, the advantage of peer support provided by qualified volunteers is fundamental to this bill. Think of it as blind people helping other blind people. Who could be more motivated to help others than those of us who have had the advantages which come from excellent training and services? We are the Aloha state. When this bill is passed blind people will have the opportunity to reach out and teach other blind people, expressing the aloha spirit with our peers on the neighbor islands. Please help us to use our skills in service to the state and to our fellow blind people in need within our state.

About implementation, HB870 will give the Department of Human Services a \$25,000 appropriation to be used for planning with affected neighbor island residents. This would be a planning grant, with further decisions to be made by the Department, community members, and the legislature.

Enactment of HB870 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 our peers who live on our neighbor islands. Supplementation of existing services, not duplication, is needed. Smart use of qualified volunteers will give blind people the chance to serve others. This approach is consistent with our values. Mahalo for your support to move this bill forward into law.

**HB-870**

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 11:23:31 AM

Testimony for HUS on 2/9/2023 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Clifford Miyashiro	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony of Clifford Miyashiro  
Committee on Human Services (HUS)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023  
February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am Clifford Miyashiro, testifying to support HB870.

This is a bill to help our fellow blind people who live on the neighbor islands in our state. I live here on Oahu and operate a vending facility right up the street from the state capitol. I am very fortunate to have this opportunity.

Most blind people, especially when they become blind later in life, it's hard to go places when transportation is so hard to get as in most parts of the neighbor islands. Isolation is a serious problem. We have good training here on Oahu, but not nearly so much in the rest of the state.

HB870 won't solve all the problems for our neighbor islands blind, but it will help to make a beginning. It won't be perfect, but better to do something rather than almost nothing, which is basically the situation right now.

Please pass HB870 to give hope to our neighbor islands blind residents. Mahalo for your consideration of their needs.

**HB-870**

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 6:28:37 PM

Testimony for HUS on 2/9/2023 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Erie Mitchell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Erie Mitchell

Hawaii House of Representatives

Thirty Second Legislature, regular session of 2023

Blind citizens are just as if not more dependent on public transportation, unless you'd rather just give them their drivers licenses.



**HB-870**

Submitted on: 2/7/2023 7:47:44 PM

Testimony for HUS on 2/9/2023 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Tabatha Mitchell	National Organization of Parents of Blind Children	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha committee members,

I am a parent of a blind child on Oahu, and I am here to ask you to support HB870. I serve on the Board of the National Organization of Parents of Blind Children, and in that service to my community, I support parents of blind kids throughout the nation & throughout all of the islands of Hawaii.

Blindness and low vision have no boundaries.

It is crucial that we establish & continue to develop programs to support blind people throughout all of the Hawaiian islands.

As a parent that has lived the reality of raising a child that happens to be blind, I can attest to the constant barriers that exist for blind people in our sighted world. Furthermore, I can attest to the extreme isolation that blindness presents.

This bill will help us break those barriers and support our blind and low vision citizens throughout all of Hawaii. Please support HB870. It is much needed; and quite frankly, very overdue.

Mahalo,

Tabatha Mitchell

NOPBC

Hawaii representative

Brandon Young

2/7/2023

Committee on Human Services (HUS)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Dear Chair Mizzuno and other committee members,

My name is Brandon Young, and I am testifying in support of HB 870. This bill is important to me as a blind person and as someone who has received rehabilitation services here on Oahu for many years.

The intent of this bill is to provide a pilot project to provide rehabilitation services to blind people who live on the neighbor islands. Currently, the choices of blind people on the neighbor islands are to receive limited rehabilitation services from counselors on the neighbor islands or to come to Oahu to receive services through the Ho`opono Services for the Blind Branch. The New Visions program that is a part of the Ho`opono Services for the Blind Branch, provides rehabilitation services for blind people for 9-12 months. This means that these people have to move to Oahu for this time period and to find housing arrangements during the times when the apartments are closed. If this project were to be approved through this bill, members of the National Federation of the Blind from Oahu would provide their skills and time and would travel to the neighbor islands for a period of time. These members would be able to provide much needed rehabilitation training on the neighbor islands. This would then provide independence to blind people on our neighbor islands who are blind or visually impaired.

I want to thank you and your committee for considering this bill that is very important to me and the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I would encourage you pass this bill so we can help many of our blind people that are struggling right now on the neighbor islands. Thank you again for your time and I hope you have a wonderful day.

Testimony of Hoku Burrows

Committee on Human Services (HUS)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Hoku Burrows, a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870. Mahalo nui loa to Representative Gregg Takayama and Bertrand Kobayashi, who serve on the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward as part of the DBTF package 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 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 Katie Keim

Committee on Human Services (HUS)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Katie Keim, a member and leader of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in full support of HB870. Mahalo nui loa to Representative Gregg Takayama and my representative, Bertrand Kobayashi, who serve on the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward as part of the DBTF package this year.

At one time in my career with DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, I had a caseload on Oahu, yet with no instructors on our neighbor islands, was sent to our neighbor islands to work with older individuals who are blind in their homes. First off, as a blind individual myself, transportation to the consumers' homes, was accomplished by hiring an individual to drive. This is the most cost and time effective way for a professional blind person to serve clients, yet during my off hours, I was isolated to my hotel.

Think of the blind older individuals I served, they were isolated the majority of their life unlike me, I could fly home to Oahu, which has good public transportation and services. Additionally, I could only visit every few months, only for a few hours, offering what I could during that limited time. Teaching cane travel instruction, personal independent living skills, like cooking cleaning and more, mentoring so needed to build confidence and give hope for a quality life, so desperately needed as blind people.

HB870 is a long overdue addition to our limited resources offered by our state programs for the blind and low vision on our neighbor islands.

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 important bill, HB870 passing for my neighbor island peers.

Testimony of Virgil Stinnett

Committee on Human Services (HUS)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023

February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. My name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, fully supporting HB870. Mahalo nui loa to Representative Gregg Takayama and my representative, Bertrand Kobayashi, who serve on the Deaf and Blind Task Force for bringing this bill forward as part of the DBTF package 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 have had the opportunity for good training and while visiting our neighbor islands, end up relying on costly transportation when participating in business or NFBH meetings, 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 limitations 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 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.

**HB-870**

Submitted on: 2/8/2023 8:14:40 AM

Testimony for HUS on 2/9/2023 9:00:00 AM

<b>Submitted By</b>	<b>Organization</b>	<b>Testifier Position</b>	<b>Testify</b>
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Emerie Mitchell-Butler  
Committee on Human Services (HUS)  
Hawaii State House of Representatives  
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023  
February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. Thank you for taking the time to consider this bill. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, a blind high school student in Hawaii, and I strongly support HB870.

I am lucky to live on Oahu, where the transportation and other services are generally adequate. As a blind person, I can't drive, which is why I'm learning how to ride the bus. The bus insures I can travel independently at a lower cost. After I leave home, I will no longer have my parents to drive me to where I need to go, so will completely or almost completely rely on the public transportation system to travel distances I can't feasibly walk.

I have the same need as blind citizens living on the neighbor islands, where public transportation may be inadequate in some areas. The passage of this bill will help to meet this need for every blind person in Hawaii, even if they live on the other islands. It is critical blind people have access to public transportation so we can get to school, work, family, and other obligations along with anywhere else we need or want to go.

Also on Oahu is Ho'opono, which provides many of the services blind people need. These services, such as orientation and mobility training as well as other blindness skills training, are critical to the wellbeing of blind people. This bill aims to supplement the training provided at Ho'opono, so all blind Hawaii residents have access to the services they need to be successful.

Your support of this bill will potentially improve the lives of hundreds, if not thousands of blind people across Hawaii. Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HB870.

Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Donald Sakamoto

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Testimony of Donald Sakamoto

Member, National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Committee on Human Services (HUS) Hawaii State House of Representatives Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2023 February 9, 2023, 9:00 AM, hearing on HB870

Good morning chair, vice chair, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, in full support of HB870.

This is a very important bill for those who are blind or anyone who becomes blind while living on our neighbor islands. A lot of these individuals who experience not being able in seeing, and being isolated is a big problem.

Some of the services for the blind are provided through the state's Ho'opono facility located here on our island of Oahu however, not quite readily available to our neighbor island residents who are unable to relocate to Oahu for some several months or longer. This bill means hope for better opportunities to enable blind and visually impaired people to improve their lives.

The bill truly acknowledges the need for a supplemental services program for blind and visually impaired people who are neighbor island residents who are seeking the best help with their independence and eventually towards employment, etc. The time is to prepare to have better services for our neighbor island residents. Famous "By failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" by Benjamin

Franklin.

I truly urge you all to please support to move this bill forward into law.