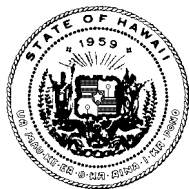


JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



CATHY BETTS
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 21, 2024

To: The Honorable Representative Kyle T. Yamashita, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Cathy Betts, Director

SUBJECT: **HB1977 HD1 – RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.**

Hearing: Friday, February 23, 2024, 1:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308, State Capitol & Video Conference

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of the measure as it provides expanded accessibility and educational and employment opportunities for individuals who are blind. The Department defers to the Department of Education regarding necessary resources, and offers comments.

PURPOSE: This bill establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for blind students. Requires the individualized education programs of eligible blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. Requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille literacy resource center. Makes an appropriation. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

The Committee on HD1 amended the measure by:

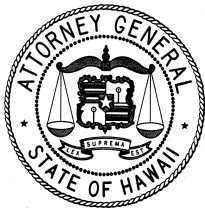
- (1) Removing the requirement for current and future needs reading and writing performance assessments to be made prior to determining if instruction in Braille or Braille instructional materials is not necessary for a student;
- (2) Deleting language that would have required Braille literacy instruction to be sufficient to enable a student to achieve at least grade level reading and writing proficiency expected of the student's peers of comparable ability;

- (3) Clarifying that a student's individualized education program:
 - (A) Shall provide the date of the student's next literacy assessment if an assessment is to be conducted; and
 - (B) Is not required to include the parents or the student's signed concurrence to exclude Braille literacy instruction and Braille instructional materials from the student's individualized education program until the next assessment of the student's literacy needs;
- (4) Changing the effective date to July 1, 3000; and
- (5) Making technical, nonsubstantive amendments for the purposes of clarity, consistency, and style.

Ho`opono Services for the Blind, a branch of the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), recognizes that reading and writing skills, including in Braille, are essential for blind individuals who are seeking higher education and competitive, integrated employment. DVR also recognizes the importance of ensuring that students who are blind and their parents or guardians are active members of the IEP team whose requests for Braille instruction should be taken into consideration to enable the students to achieve their highest capabilities. Technology is not a replacement for literacy.

Ho`opono Services for the Blind works with blind and visually impaired individuals to teach many skills, such as orientation and mobility, home management, Braille, and other areas, to prepare them for vocational training, higher education, and employment. Building skills and confidence in these areas contributes to our clients' sense of independence and the ability to be contributing members of their community.

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



**TESTIMONY OF
THE DEPARTMENT OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL
KA 'OIHANA O KA LOIO KUHINA
THIRTY-SECOND LEGISLATURE, 2024**

ON THE FOLLOWING MEASURE:

H.B. NO. 1977, H.D. 1, RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

BEFORE THE:

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

DATE: Friday, February 23, 2024 **TIME:** 1:00 p.m.

LOCATION: State Capitol, Room 308 and Videoconference

TESTIFIER(S): Anne E. Lopez, Attorney General, or
Anne T. Horiuchi, Deputy Attorney General

Chair Yamashita and Members of the Committee:

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

The bill establishes state policy to promote Braille literacy for blind students. The bill requires the individualized education programs of eligible blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances; requires the Department of Education (DOE) to establish a Braille literacy resource center; and makes an appropriation.

Section 302A-D(a)(4) of the new part proposed to be added to chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes (HRS), by section 2 of this bill, on page 6, lines 6 through 11, provides that the Braille Literacy Resource Center (Center), to be established and maintained by the DOE, shall "[a]ward and administer grants or contracts with one or more entities that the department finds qualified to provide in-state braille transcription services, or provide financial support in whole or in part for the establishment of braille transcription services by a qualified entity[.]"

To the extent that the Legislature intends that the Center is to award and administer grants, this bill should be clarified to identify or to establish the administrative grants program and to provide by law the standards needed to be in compliance with section 4 of article VII of the State Constitution ("No grant of public money or property shall be made except pursuant to standards provided

by law."). The bill does not appear to have adequate standards by which the Center is to distribute grants, and the bill should be amended to insert such standards. Examples of existing statutes that provide standards for agencies to expend funds are part II of chapter 9, and sections 10-17, 210D-11, and 383-128, HRS. Additionally, we have attached draft standards to this testimony as a sample to work from, and we are happy to work with the Committee on developing more specific standards. If a grants program is not the intent, then the wording "grants or" should be deleted from page 6, line 6, and "make grants or" should be deleted from the appropriation wording at page 9, line 4.

The proposed section 302A-D(a)(4) also states that the Center will "provide financial support in whole or in part for the establishment of braille transcription services by a qualified entity[.]" Page 6, lines 9-11. With regard to this phrase, the Department suggests the following:

- It is unclear what "financial support" this could be, and how it differs – if at all – from a grant or a contract. The Department recommends that this phrase be revised for clarity.
- It is unclear whether or how the "establishment of braille transcription services by a qualified entity" differs from the in-state Braille transcription services referenced on line 8 or whether this portion of paragraph (4) is meant to indicate that the Center shall provide financial support to an out-of-state "qualified" entity to provide Braille transcription services. The Department recommends that this phrase also be revised for clarity.

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

POSSIBLE STANDARDS FOR THE FUNDING IN THIS BILL

(a) Each application for funding under section 302A-D(a)(4) (*or wherever the standards are placed in the new part established by the bill*) shall at a minimum:

- (1) State the name of the applicant requesting funds;
- (2) State the amount of funds being requested; and
- (3) Describe the services to be offered, as well as the expected outcomes to be achieved.

(b) An applicant may be eligible for funds if the applicant uses the funds to:

- (1) Provide in-state braille transcription services; or
- (2) Provide services related to the establishment of braille transcription services.

(c) Funds shall be distributed as follows:

- (1) Up to \$____ for the in-state braille transcription services for up to ____ hours of service; or
- (2) Up to \$____ for services related to the establishment of braille transcription services for up to ____ hours.

(d) Any grant of funds shall be used exclusively for the purposes under this section.

(e) The applicant shall have applied for or received all applicable licenses or permits necessary for the operation of its business, and for the employment of personnel.

(f) The applicant for or recipient of the funds shall comply with other requirements or conditions as the department may prescribe, including those prescribed by the department to implement the braille transcription services.

(g) The recipient of the funds shall comply with all federal, state, or county statutes, rules, or ordinances, necessary to conduct the activities for which funding is given.

(h) The applicant for or recipient of the funds shall comply with all applicable federal and state laws prohibiting discrimination against any person on the basis of race, color, national origin, religion, creed, sex, age, sexual orientation, or disability, or any other characteristic protected under applicable law.

(i) The applicant for or recipient of the funds shall allow the department, and its staff, and the auditor full access to the applicant's or recipient's records, reports, files, and other related documents and information for purposes of monitoring and ensuring the proper expenditure of funds.

(j) The recipient of the funds shall indemnify and save harmless the State of Hawaii and its officers, agents, and employees from and against any and all claims arising out of or resulting from activities carried out or projects undertaken with funds provided hereunder and procure sufficient insurance to provide this indemnification.

(k) The department shall not release the public funds approved for an applicant unless a contract is entered into between the department and the recipient of the funds. The department shall develop and determine, in consultation with and subject to the review and approval of the attorney general, the specific contract form to be used. Each such contract shall be monitored by the department to ensure compliance with this part. Each such contract shall be evaluated annually to determine whether the funds attained the intended results in the manner contemplated.

(l) The applicant shall satisfy any other standards that may be required by the source of funding.

(m) Any recipient of funds who withholds or omits any material fact or deliberately misrepresents facts to the department shall be in violation of this section. In addition to any other penalties provided by law, any recipient found by the department to have violated this section or the terms of its contract shall be prohibited from applying for any department grants for a period of five years from the date of termination.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

1010 Richards Street, Room 118 • Honolulu, Hawaii 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • TTY (808) 586-8162 • Fax (808) 586-8129

February 23, 2024

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

House Bill 1977 HD1 – Relating to Braille Literacy

The Disability and Communication Access Board (DCAB) supports the intent of House Bill 1977 HD1 – Relating to Braille Literacy.

This bill requires the individualized education programs of blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances to enable them to achieve Braille literacy, which is essential for them to learn and obtain and maintain remunerative employment, and opportunities in life.

This bill establishes a Braille literacy center that will, among other things, obtain Braille materials as needed; award and administer grants or contracts with qualified entities, or otherwise fund in whole or in part a qualified entity to provide transcription services; register eligible blind students with the Department of Human Services pursuant to Hawaii Revised Statutes §347-6; provide to parents and the student comprehensive information about Braille literacy instruction, Braille instructional materials, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including tools and options available to assess the student's Braille literacy needs; and as appropriate, involve the eligible blind student in his or her individualized education program.

For the above reasons, DCAB supports the intent of House Bill 1977 HD1.

Thank you for considering our position.

Respectfully submitted,

KIRBY L. SHAW
Executive Director



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

Date: 02/23/2024

Time: 01:00 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: House Finance

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB 1977, HD1 RELATING TO BRAILLE LITERACY.

Purpose of Bill: Establishes state policy to promote braille literacy for blind students. Requires the individualized education programs of eligible blind students to include the instruction of Braille and provision of Braille instructional materials under certain circumstances. Requires the Department of Education to establish a Braille literacy resource center. Makes an appropriation. Effective 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawaii Department of Education (Department) respectfully provides comments on HB 1977 HD1 and requests revisions to provide clarity on this measure.

Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams are required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), 34 CFR §300.324(2)(iii) and the Hawaii Administrative Rules (HAR) §8-60-48 (2)(C) to provide for instruction in braille and the use of braille unless the team determines, through evaluating a student's reading and writing skills, that instruction in braille is not appropriate. In addition, 34 CFR §300.320 and HAR §8-60-44 through §8-60-48 delineate the definition of an IEP and specify requirements for IEP contents. Given that these federal laws and administrative rules delineate the Department's responsibility regarding braille instruction and the use of braille as well as the requirements for developing IEPs, there is no need for legislation.

Therefore, the Department suggests removing information in Sections 1, 2, and 3 except for content related to the Braille Literacy Resource Center. Specifically, beginning on

page 1, line 1 through page 2, line 2 should be removed and on page 2, lines 3 and 4 should be numbered (1) and (2) respectively; and on page 2 lines 6 through page 5 line 14 should be removed as follows:

~~“SECTION 1. The legislature finds that literacy skills are fundamental to success in education, employment, and life for all members of society, including individuals who are blind. The legislature further finds that braille literacy skills are essential for individuals who are blind to learn, seek and maintain remunerative employment, and access the opportunities in life open to all regardless of disability.~~

~~The legislature also finds that it is in the interest of the State to make learning opportunities available to all residents. Therefore, it is necessary for the State to promote braille instruction and the timely access to braille instructional materials for blind students, parents, teachers, and other school personnel.~~

~~Accordingly, the purpose of this Act is to:~~

~~(1) Require the individualized education programs of blind students to include the instruction of braille and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances;”~~

~~(2) (1) Require the department of education to establish a braille literacy resource center, and~~

~~(3) (2) Make an appropriation.~~

~~“SECTION 2. Chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes, is amended by adding a new part to be appropriately designated and to read as follows:~~

~~“PART BRAILLE INSTRUCTION~~

~~§302A-A Purpose. It is the policy of the State to promote braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual.~~

~~§302A-B Definitions. As used in this part, unless the context otherwise requires:~~

~~“Braille” has the same meaning as in section 302A-442.5.~~

~~“Braille instructional materials” means print instructional materials, as defined in section 302A-442.5, that are printed in braille.~~

~~“Eligible blind student” means an elementary or secondary school student who:~~

- ~~1. Is eligible for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended;~~
- ~~2. Is approved as an eligible person, as defined in section 121(d)(3) of the Copyright Act of 1976 (17 U.S.C. 121(d)(3)), as amended; and~~
- ~~3. Attends a department school, a private school under chapter 302C, a public charter school under chapter 302D, or an approved alternative education program under section 302A-1132(a)(5),~~

~~and is blind or visually handicapped.~~

~~“Individualized education program” and “individualized education program team” have the same meanings as in section 614(d) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (20 U.S.C. section 1414(d)), as amended.~~

~~§302A-C Individualized education program; eligible blind students; braille instructional materials. (a) The individualized education program for an eligible blind student shall include instruction in braille and provision of braille instructional materials unless the individualized education program team determines that the instruction or materials are not necessary for the student.~~

~~(b) If braille literacy instruction is included in the eligible blind students individualized~~

~~education program, the individualized education program shall:~~

~~(1) Document:~~

~~(A) The results of current braille reading and writing assessments of the student, if any;~~

~~(B) The date on which braille literacy instruction will commence;~~

~~(C) The length of the period of instruction and the frequency and duration of each instructional session; and~~

~~(D) Performance goals for the end of the period and the objective assessment measures to be used; and~~

~~(2) Summarize how use of acquired braille skills and braille instructional materials will be incorporated into the student's general education program and daily activities.~~

~~(c) If the individualized education program team decides that braille literacy instruction is not necessary for an eligible blind student in accordance with subsection (b), the student's individualized education program shall:~~

~~(1) Document the student's:~~

~~(A) Visual condition, including cause, visual acuity, field of vision, visual functioning over time, stability of the condition, and prognosis; and~~

~~(B) Ability to achieve at least grade level reading and writing proficiency without regard to the use of braille, as expected of the student's peers of comparable ability to learn and progress from grade to grade in school;~~

~~(2) Identify the literacy assessment tools and methods used; and~~

~~(3) Provide the date of the student's next literacy assessment, if one is to be conducted, not to exceed twelve months from the previous assessment."~~

In regards to the Braille Literacy Resource Center, the Department suggests removing verbiage related to ensuring that each eligible blind student is registered with the Department of Human Services pursuant to section 347-6 given the Department's inability to provide oversight to other state departments. As such, on page 6, lines 12 through page 7 line 2 should be deleted as follows:

~~"(5) Ensure that each eligible blind student is registered with the department of human services pursuant to section 347-6;~~

~~(6) For each student registered pursuant to paragraph (5), provide the parent or legal guardian and, as appropriate, the student with comprehensive information about braille literacy instruction, braille instructional materials, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including tools and options available to assess the student's braille literacy needs; and~~

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

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2024 11:37:16 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joel Cho	National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and distinguished Committee members,

My name is Joel Cho and I stand firm with the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii in strong support of HB1977. Hawaii’s blind children need this bill to become law so that it will enforce their right to have the opportunity to learn Braille. Only a small percentage of our blind children are provided with access to learning Braille and this needs to change. It is a fact that learning Braille is the only way that a blind person can truly become literate. While advancements in technology have made life easier for blind people, Braille has also been incorporated in that same technology and Braille users have a much greater ease of access in using devices such as smart phones and computers than blind people who do not know Braille. Braille readers on average read much faster than the average sighted person; this is because Braille uses a lot of contractions and shortcuts, this is similar to comparing shorthand with longhand writing. Students who use Braille have a much easier time completing reading assignments and exams in a timely manner, often ahead of their sighted classmates.

Braille should always be considered first. While large print and magnifiers are useful in some situations, they are no substitute for Braille. Large print slows down reading speed and the overuse of magnifiers will place unnecessary strain on the eyeballs. Anybody who has ever tried reading a book with a magnifying glass for more than a couple of minutes can easily understand this. . Increasing the brightness or enlarging text on a computer screen can also become very damaging to a child’s eyesight over the long term. While adults can learn Braille, it often takes a lot more time and discipline than it would for a child, much like learning a new language or musical instrument, these things just come easier at an early age.

On a personal note, I sure wish that Braille would have been available to me as a student struggling to navigate through Hawaii’s public school system. I often sat in the front row but could rarely see everything on the chalkboard. Although I did well on written assignments and was told by my teachers that I was a gifted writer, I was always the slowest reader in class and very much dreaded being called upon to read out loud. As a high school sophomore, I let my teammates down after being academically suspended from participating in sports because I failed a science class that had a lot of visual elements, such as observing and examining objects under a microscope. When I took the college SAT test, I found the questions to be very easy, but due to slow reading I did not complete the test in time and scored very low and this severely limited my

college options. After struggling through college for a couple of semesters and as the words and pages began to become a faded blur, I eventually gave up and dropped out of college. Later in life I was able to overcome my blindness and become a very productive member of society, much thanks to Hawaii's Business Enterprise Program for the blind for giving me that opportunity. But it could have easily gone another direction as it has unfortunately gone for many others in this same situation. We've come a long way in the last 40 years, but we haven't come far enough. As evident by some of the testimony against this bill, there remains a lot of ignorance and misunderstanding of the importance of learning Braille. The needless resistance to provide Braille needs to come to an end. Blind children and children who are losing their vision at an early age need Braille, not because it's the only way, but because it is the best possible tool that they can be given to help them succeed in their own educational paths.

Mahalo,

Joel Cho

Testimony of James Gashel
Submitted for National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii
Committee on Finance (FIN)
Hawaii State House of Representatives
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024
February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM, hearing on HB1977 H.D. 1

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am James Gashel, representing the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii, proudly supporting HB1977 and the H.D. 1 version passed by the Education committee. This is a truly important bill on behalf of blind people and our Hawaii blind students in K-12 education, preparing for life.

One part of standing up for Braille literacy is "to make an appropriation," third in the listed purposes of HB1977. The appropriation is needed to underwrite establishment of a Braille production service within our state. It's disappointing and shocking that Hawaii has no capacity at present for production of Braille books and other materials within the state, meaning we must depend on sources on the mainland for this service.

It takes lots of extra time just to get things from somewhere on the mainland, then packed up and shipped here to Hawaii. Blind students are just left out when materials are needed, sometimes overnight, or perhaps within a week, and can't get here from the mainland on time.

People who've been here longer than I have say it wasn't always this way. So, we come to the legislature to ask for an in-state Braille production service once again. Is this too much to ask for, to hope for? Is literacy too much to expect from the schools? We don't think it is.

The Hawaii Department of Education (DOE) gets federal support to pay costs for Braille and other materials for students who can't use standard printed books. One hundred seventy K-12 Hawaii students were registered for these materials in fiscal year 2022, but only thirty were Braille readers. That's 30 out of 170 DOE knows can't see enough to read ordinary printed books, leaving 140 out of 170 to struggle along some way in school. We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could.

More of these one hundred forty students could soon get the Braille instruction and Braille materials they need if you approve HB1977. That may seem like a small number, but you'll be helping many thousands in the future added up year by year. You'll save the state money too by investing today in Braille literacy for the blind students of today and tomorrow.

A 2018 study, reported in the Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research, concludes: "... individuals who were primary braille readers since childhood had greater life-satisfaction, self-esteem, and job satisfaction than individuals who reported not using braille as their primary reading medium during childhood." Also: "Findings support the

premise that braille literacy is key to life satisfaction and self-esteem in addition to academic and job success." And: "Those who are Braille literate are more likely to be employed than those who are not."

Speaking on behalf of the members of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii and our blind keiki members too, I am proud to ask you to support and pass HB1977. 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

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/21/2024 6:13:32 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Braille is a core component of education for students who are blind and so we support the bill.

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 7:03:54 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Clifford Miyashiro	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Clifford Miyashiro, testifying to support HB1977 on behalf of blind people and our Hawaii blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 10:42:04 AM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Deborah Gabe	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Before the Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024

February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Deborah Gabe, testifying to support HB1977 on behalf of blind people and blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

HB1977 says: "It is the policy of the state to promote Braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual."

People considered "blind" are not just those who have no residual vision at all, that is, "totally blind". It also refers to those who have lost enough vision so as to warrant the use of accommodations or other so-called "blindness" skills that people who are fully sighted do not need to use in their daily lives.

It should be noted that fully sighted high school graduates who attend college have a reading level between 200 to 250 words per minute. Many partially blind, or visually-impaired, students are taught to read only print using enlarged or magnified print. That's a good thing for them to learn. However, I know from personal experience that once you begin enlarging or magnifying print, your reading speed degrades. And the more you have to magnify the print, the slower the reading speed gets. I also know that a person who reads magnified print cannot read this way for any length of time longer than approximately 20 minutes without getting headaches, severe eyestrain, and great fatigue.

I also know from talking with many parents whose visually-impaired children receive special ed services in the DOE , that when the reading speed and levels of these children are measured, they are not compared with sighted peers, but with other visually-impaired peers. And then the parents are told that their children's reading is "just fine".

Many students with partial blindness are not taught braille because the students can see print (with enlargement or magnification). This is very short-sighted thinking. I also know that as high schoolers, their reading speeds may be down as low as 35 words per minute. How can they possibly compete with sighted peers when they go to college or grad school or looking for jobs? And how fair is it for the parents not to be told the whole truth about their child's reading level?

Many parents initially think it's a good thing that their partially blind child does not "need" to learn braille since the child can see magnified print. But these parents are not told about Dr. Edward Bell's several research articles showing that people with any degree of blindness have the best chance of finding a job and getting paid a "good" salary if they use braille on a daily basis. And I know from talking with parents and hearing their children read braille, that the children who begin learning braille between ages 3 and 5 years, can end up reading braille at between 300 to 400 words per minute. Do you think that these observations and facts might convince more than a few parents to urge the DOE to begin teaching braille to their children?

A partially blind person has choices in their toolbox for reading if they are taught not only print but also braille. I, for example, prefer to read in braille, but I will use a magnifier to look at photos or other graphics.

Some short-sighted educators might say that these children learn how to use screen reader software on computers, so they don't need braille. However, would one say that a fully sighted child does not need to learn how to read print from paper or books if they know how to read it from a computer? Obviously not. They are given options.

There are also a good many young children who have blindness from something that will cause their vision to deteriorate further over time. If they are taught braille as young children, they would be ready to use it more and more as their vision worsens. I have such an eye condition and I was not taught braille until I could no longer see print at the age of 55 years. Since I learned it so late and although I use braille all the time, my reading speed has yet to break 100 words per minute.

In 2022, only 30 out of the 170 K-12 students DOE registered with APH for special education materials use Braille. That's 30 out of 170 DOE knows can't see enough to read ordinary printed books, leaving 140 out of 170 to struggle along some way in school. We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could. HB1977 is for these students and thousands more in the future who can't see or read very well but still won't get Braille materials or Braille instruction without a stronger mandate from the legislature.

I strongly urge you to support and pass HB1977.

Mahalo for your consideration of this very important bill.

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 12:34:51 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony of Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Before the Committee on Finance (FIN)

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024

February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon chair, vice chair, and members. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, a student at Kalāheo High School on the Windward side of O‘ahu. I am testifying in support of HB1977 on behalf of my fellow blind students. Thank you for considering this important bill.

Braille is what I use to read and write every single day. It is a comprehensive and effective tactile system used by blind people to interact with writing, such as literary content, math and science notation, music notation, and more. Thanks to the advocacy of my family and school system, I began receiving braille instruction before I was in kindergarten. This allowed me to be on track with the literacy skills of my peers from day one. All of us enjoyed the same stories and groaned through the same spelling tests.

Now that I’m in high school, braille is even more critical to my success. In English, I use braille to insure my papers are of the highest quality. In Chemistry, I relied on braille to balance chemical equations. In Modern History of Hawai‘i, I used braille alongside audio to learn oli. Most critically for me now is my use of braille to understand calculus, but I also use braille to learn my percussion parts in band. But, my favorite use of braille is for quiet leisure reading after a busy day. I am so glad I get to graduate from high school the same year braille turns 200 years old.

That was my experience. I was lucky. Here in Hawai‘i, our Department of Education (DOE) registered 170 K-12 students as having visual impairments enough to qualify for special education materials in 2022. Of those, only 30 out of 170 use braille. 140 students aren’t receiving braille instruction. Yes, there is a variety of reasons for this, but what if some students

don't read braille not because of any valid reason, but because somebody thought it wasn't necessary? I know that some kids, especially if they have a lot of vision, are pushed to use magnified print. But I also know that this isn't the best solution for every student with some vision. HB1977 is for these students and thousands more in the future who can't see or read very well but still won't get Braille materials or Braille instruction without a stronger mandate from the legislature.

This bill is also for future students who are receiving braille instruction but struggle to get specialized braille materials. I decided to take band, which means I now need music to be translated into braille. Knowledge of music braille isn't required to be a teacher of the visually impaired (TVI), so many can't transcribe music into braille. My music is sent to the mainland to be transcribed and is shipped back. From my band director emailing the music to me having my part in my hand takes six weeks or more, and there are often massive mistakes in the transcription. These materials are often small (not textbooks) but specialized. I think the establishment of a braille resource center in Hawai'i will give blind students better access to materials like these. This means our blind students will feel comfortable participating in fulfilling activities like music classes and extracurriculars, knowing that they will have access to critical materials. The opposite is isolation, wasted money, and wasted time.

This bill asks the legislature to pass a pro-active Braille literacy law. Thirty-three states have laws that call for greater Braille instruction in K-12 education, but Hawai'i is not among these states. Clearly we can do better.

I love braille. I love that I get to immerse myself in stories, challenge myself with high level math, read maps of our world, and write down my thoughts in a format that I can read in the future. I want every blind student in Hawai'i to feel the joy of literacy like I do. I also want every blind student to have the fewest barriers to success as possible. Bringing students through school without teaching them a way to consume information efficiently is surely creating an unnecessary barrier.

I am pleased to live in a state with such forward thinking legislation regarding blind people already in place. Let's add the promotion of literacy to the list.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Emerie Mitchell-Butler

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 12:57:01 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Tabatha Mitchell	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice-chair, and committee members,

I am Tabatha Mitchell of Kāne'ohe, Hawai'i. I am mother to 5 keiki. 2 of those 5 have graduated from Hawai'i public schools, with another is set to graduate from Kalaheo High School this May.

Like her brother & sisters before her, my 2024 graduate is on path for adulthood, to being a contributing member to society - a tax payer. This is the common thing we all expect of our children. To grow up, make it through high school, and to find a job or career where they can support themselves - hopefully doing something they like. Maybe go on to college. Maybe not. But to get a job and eventually begin to find their own way in life.

Twelve years ago, I did not have that expectancy for my 2024 graduate. I was told that she would likely be living with me for ever, unless I found a community "home" for her. I was advised by countless professionals that she would likely be "mentally retarded" because that is what the statistics in medical literature correlated with being blind. Countless professionals discounted her completely without knowing anything at all about her, and set shockingly low standards for her - like not expecting her to be able to feed herself, or to live unassisted, or to even leave her house.

This was a 3 year old keiki that ran through the parks, played at the beach, and held court with every adult on the playground & beach because she had the vocabulary and wit of an adult. Yet, statistics in 2009 reflected that as a blind adult, there was a 70% chance she'd be unemployed.

I did a little digging through Google, like the new-age parent that I am, and I discovered that of the 30% of blind people that were employed, a shockingly high percentage of them knew Braille. I knew what my job was.

My job was to teach Braille to my youngest daughter, who happened to be blind. But, just like most of you sitting in committee today, I did not know Braille. I only knew it as the cool raised dots on signs outside of the bathrooms or outside of rooms here & there. So my job was to make sure that my daughter was taught Braille.

And I'm writing this testimony today to tell you that managing to have my daughter learn Braille was not an easy task. It has been an uphill battle. And this legislation aims to help those parents that find themselves in that place. Please find a Braille Resource Center for the Hawai'i keiki and their parents. They need advocates to represent the possible. And Braille paves the way for a lifetime of possibilities beyond a life of poverty waiting on a disability check.

please support HB1977 HD1.

HB-1977-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/22/2024 3:51:43 PM

Testimony for FIN on 2/23/2024 1:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Travis Morita test	Individual	Comments	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

test

Testimony of Donald Sakamoto
Member, National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii

Before the Committee on Finance (FIN)
Hawaii State House of Representatives
Thirty-second Legislature, regular session of 2024
February 23, 2024, 1:00 PM, hearing on HB1977

Good afternoon Chair Kyle Yamashita, Vice- Chair Lisa Kitagawa, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, testifying to support HB1977 for those blind people and blind students who wish to use braille.

HB1977 says: "It is the policy of the state to promote Braille literacy and support opportunities for blind students to obtain reading and writing skills to the maximum extent achievable for each blind individual."

These are definitely powerful words, saying that blind people such as myself, and especially those blind children matter to the legislature and the people in our State. Literacy education is fundamental to success in our life. When we are blind, our literacy toolkit needs to include strong braille reading and writing skills. HB1977 truly states this understanding.

Many years ago, a young blind boy by the name of Terence Tom lived on Oahu and was able to learn how to read braille throughout his life. In fact, he was able to become a prominent attorney, and served as the first blind state house of representative for the 48th district for some 16 years.

The time is now to prepare to have this bill passed to have our blind students the opportunity to learn braille in our schools in order to succeed in their Daly lives such as Terence Tom did. Famous "by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail" by Benjamin Franklin.

Mahalo and please let's prepare to do the right thing and "GO FOR BROKE" and move this bill forward.

Dear Finance Chair,

My name is BrandonYoung and I am a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii. I submitting testimony in favor of bill Hb1977. This bill would help all blind children in our educational system. I urge you pass this bill. I want to thank you and your committee for taking the time to hear our bill. I hope you have a wonderful day.

Brandon