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# A BILL FOR AN ACT

RELATING TO ACT 253, SESSION LAWS OF HAWAII 2023.

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF HAWAII:**

1       SECTION 1. Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023,  
2       established the neighbor islands blind and visually impaired  
3       service pilot program within the department of human services.  
4       The goal of Act 253 is to bridge the gaps in services for blind  
5       and low vision residents across the State, particularly focusing  
6       on those living on the neighbor islands. The department's  
7       efforts to implement the Act were delayed until July 2024 as the  
8       department's staff were responding to the needs of staff and  
9       residents impacted by the 2023 Maui wildfires.

10       Despite the delays, the department engaged a consultant,  
11       posted a survey, and had several in-person and virtual meetings  
12       to gather information from blind and low vision neighbor island  
13       residents to discuss potential training and services that the  
14       pilot program may offer. A report to the legislature was  
15       submitted in December 2024 detailing the department's efforts,  
16       findings, and recommendations that include requests for two



1 additional temporary full-time equivalent positions within the  
2 department and appropriations to implement the pilot program.

3 The purpose of this Act is to:

4 (1) Rename the pilot program to replace the term "visually  
5 impaired" with the less stigmatizing term "low  
6 vision," and

7 (2) Clarify the pilot program's implementation timeframes.

8 SECTION 2. Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023,  
9 section 2, is amended as follows:

10 1. By amending subsections (a) and (b) to read:

11 "(a) The department shall establish a neighbor islands  
12 blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot program  
13 to provide training and other services to blind and [~~visually~~  
14 ~~impaired~~] low vision individuals residing on the neighbor  
15 islands.

16 (b) The pilot program shall provide peer-to-peer outreach,  
17 sight loss adjustment, peer counseling support, and mobility  
18 training to program participants, including:

19 (1) Outreach efforts to identify individual and program  
20 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 for use of telecommunications services to receive current news, weather alerts, and other vital public information;
- (5) Awareness development and training for the use of technology, including but not limited to 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.

The services provided by the pilot program pursuant to this subsection shall be provided by volunteers, who shall be recruited, assigned, and supervised by the department or an



1 entity contracted by the department to organize and implement  
2 the pilot program. All volunteers shall have the necessary  
3 qualifications, be chosen based on experience and training, and  
4 use training methods consistent with the structured discovery  
5 approach used by the new visions program operated by the Hoopono  
6 services for the blind branch within the department's division  
7 of vocational rehabilitation."

8 2. By amending subsections (f) through (h) to read:

9 "(f) The department shall enter into a contract with a  
10 nonprofit organization to recruit, train, and supervise  
11 volunteer service corps members and oversee the pilot program;  
12 provided that existing department personnel may be assigned to  
13 fulfill administrative and fiscal responsibilities of the pilot  
14 program. Any contract entered into pursuant to this subsection  
15 shall be exempt from chapters 103D and 103F. Any nonprofit  
16 organization contracted under this subsection shall have:

17 (1) The knowledge, experience, and qualifications  
18 necessary to provide peer support services to program  
19 participants;



(2) A management team, consisting of officers and directors, of whom a majority are blind or [~~visually impaired~~] low vision; and

(3) Membership chapters or organization subunits located on the neighbor islands that will be served by the pilot program.

(g) The department shall establish a neighbor islands blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision service pilot program working group composed of neighbor island residents who are blind or [~~visually impaired~~] low vision to make recommendations regarding the establishment and implementation of the pilot program. The department, in collaboration with the working group, shall develop a written implementation plan that includes a pilot program performance period and program budget, and shall submit the plan, including any proposed legislation, to the legislature no later than twenty days prior to the convening of the regular session of [~~2024~~] 2026. The working group shall be exempt from the requirements of part I of chapter 92, Hawaii Revised Statutes.

(h) The department shall submit a report of its findings and recommendations pertaining to the neighbor islands blind and



1 ~~[visually impaired]~~ low vision service pilot program to the  
2 legislature no later than thirty days prior to the convening of  
3 the regular session of 2029. The report shall include:

4 (1) A record of pilot program activities and  
5 accomplishments;

6 (2) A recommendation on whether to extend the pilot  
7 program; and

8 (3) Any proposed legislation."

9 3. By amending subsections (j) and (k) to read:

10 "(j) The pilot program ~~[shall begin no later than~~  
11 ~~January 1, 2024, and]~~ shall cease to exist on July 30, 2029.

12 (k) For the purposes of this section:

13 "Department" means the department of human services.

14 "Neighbor island" means a county with a population less  
15 than five hundred thousand.

16 "Pilot program" means the neighbor islands blind and  
17 ~~[visually impaired]~~ low vision service pilot program established  
18 pursuant to this Act.

19 "Program participant" means a resident of a neighbor island  
20 whose mobility or ability to live independently is substantially  
21 limited due to loss of sight and who is participating in the



1 neighbor islands blind and [~~visually impaired~~] low vision  
2 service pilot program.

3 "Special needs transportation" means transportation  
4 provided to program participants at times or for trips when  
5 public transportation is not a reasonable option."

6 SECTION 3. Statutory material to be repealed is bracketed  
7 and stricken. New statutory material is underscored.

8 SECTION 4. This Act shall take effect on July 1, 2025, and  
9 shall be repealed on June 30, 2029.



**Report Title:**

DHS; Neighbor Islands Blind and Low Vision Service Pilot Program

**Description:**

Updates the name of the Neighbor Islands Blind and Visually Impaired Service Pilot Program established by Act 253, Session Laws of Hawaii 2023, by replacing the term "visually impaired" with the term "low vision" and clarifies the pilot program's implementation timeframes. Sunsets 6/30/2029. (SD1)

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