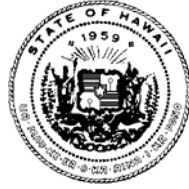


JOSH GREEN, M.D.  
GOVERNOR  
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE  
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

April 7, 2026

TO: The Honorable Senator Donovan Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB1894 HD1 SD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.**

Hearing: April 8, 2026, 10:02 a.m.  
Conference Room, State Capitol

**DEPARTMENT'S POSITION:** The Department of Human Services (DHS) supports this measure, provides comments, and respectfully defers to the Department of Education (DOE) regarding operational considerations, resource needs, and implementation timelines.

DHS appreciates the Legislature's thoughtful recognition that braille literacy is foundational to educational success, employment, independence, and full community participation for individuals who are blind or have low vision. As outlined in the measure, promoting braille instruction, ensuring timely access to Braille instructional materials, and supporting informed decision-making through Section 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) reflect a commitment to equity and long-term outcomes for students.

From the perspective of the DHS Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), literacy is not only an educational issue; it is directly tied to employment readiness and competitive, integrated employment. Research shows that fewer than 10% of the approximately 1.3 million legally blind Americans are braille readers, and only around 10% of blind children are learning braille in school. Of all blind adults who are employed, about 90% are reported to be braille

literate, suggesting a strong correlation: individuals who are braille literate experience better employment outcomes, higher earnings potential, and greater independence. The bill's focus on assessment, instruction, and access to validated materials aligns with what we know leads to stronger adult employment outcomes.

DVR appreciates the provisions requiring cooperation with DHS to maintain the State's register of the blind pursuant to section 346-6, Hawaii Revised Statutes. Early coordination between education and vocational rehabilitation services is critical to seamless transition planning.

For the committee's information, students with disabilities are eligible to participate in DVR's Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) beginning in high school. These services support career exploration, work-based learning experiences, workplace readiness training, counseling on postsecondary opportunities, and self-advocacy instruction.

DVR stands ready to collaborate with DOE to support students who are blind or have low vision in achieving their educational and employment goals, and we look forward to continued interagency partnership in advancing this important work.

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



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

**Date:** 04/08/2026

**Time:** 10:02 AM

**Location:** CR 211 & Videoconference

**Committee:** WAM

**Department:** Education

**Person Testifying:** Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

**Title of Bill:** HB1894, SD1, RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**Purpose of Bill:** Requires the Department of Education to include the instruction of braille and provision of braille instructional materials under certain circumstances; provide braille literacy support services; cooperate with the Department of Human Services when requested to submit information necessary to maintain a register of the blind in the State; provide comprehensive information about braille literacy services, assistive technology devices, and assistive technology services, including educational programming options; and participate in the development of section 504 plans and individualized education programs. Appropriates funds. Effective 7/31/2055. (SD1)

**Department's Position:**

The Hawai'i Department of Education (Department) supports HB1894 HD1 SD1 as an opportunity to further strengthen, formalize, and expand access to braille literacy and related instructional resources for students who are blind or have low vision. Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams are required to provide instruction in braille and the use of braille unless, after an appropriate evaluation, the IEP team determines that braille is not appropriate for the student. Schools must also monitor student progress, conduct necessary assessments, and review educational plans at least annually to ensure students who are blind or have low vision can meaningfully access and make progress in the general education curriculum.

To further promote consistent statewide implementation and equitable access to high-quality braille instruction, the Department respectfully requests consideration of recurring funding to provide full and effective implementation of the program and statewide coordination. While the Department currently funds existing braille services and remains committed to meeting its federal and state obligations, sustaining the Braille Literacy Resource Center will require highly specialized personnel, technical expertise, ongoing professional development, and accessible instructional materials.

The Department estimates that at least \$300,000 in recurring funding would be

necessary to support these ongoing operational needs. While \$233,846 was included in the Board of Education's approved budget for these purposes, the Department took a prudent approach to developing its budget in the current fiscal landscape and did not request the full funding estimate. If this measure is enacted, additional resources would be necessary to fully implement the program.

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

National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii  
testimony submitted by James Gashel, legislative chair

Hawaii State Senate  
Ways and Means (WAM) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session  
April 8, 2026, 10:02 am, hearing on HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

Good morning Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and WAM Committee members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, strongly supporting HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for considering this bill.

HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1 declares: "It is a policy of the State to promote braille literacy and support the provision of braille educational services needed for eligible low vision or blind students to fully participate in school and prepare students for life beyond the classroom." The bill's findings underscore the need for this policy, leading to greater emphasis on braille education for low vision and blind students in Hawaii.

DOE staff told us they registered one hundred seventy K-12 students as having low vision or blindness enough to qualify for special education materials in 2025. These materials are paid for by the federal government. But here's the point, only about ten percent of students registered for special education materials get braille instruction. That's about seventeen out of one hundred seventy students DOE knows can't see enough to read ordinary printed books, leaving as many as one hundred fifty three out of one hundred seventy to struggle along some way in school.

We know they don't get Braille materials or Braille instruction, but they could. HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1 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 asks you to pass a pro-active Braille literacy law. DOE central office program staff, Jamia Green and Haruka Hopper, helped write this bill. I can't speak for them, but many of their words are in this bill. It's a better bill because they helped to put it together.

You can't mandate Braille in every case, but you can require assessments, which this bill does. This will better ensure consideration of Braille services when developing each blind student's individualized education program, consistent with federal law and existing DOE regulations. Thirty-three states have laws that call for greater Braille instruction in K-12 education, but Hawaii is not among these states. Clearly we should do better.

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 pass HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1. 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 again for your consideration.

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 6:39:02 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b>                               | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Louis Erteschik     | Testifying for Hawaii<br>Disability Rights Center | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

In support.



[www.AlohaILHawaii.org](http://www.AlohaILHawaii.org)

Apr 8, 2026

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The Honorable Donovan M. Dela Cruz, Chair  
Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
The Thirty-Third Legislature  
State Capitol  
State of Hawaii  
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

**SUBJECT:** HB1894 HD1 SD1 – Relating to Education (Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act)

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) **strongly supports HB1894 HD1 SD1**, the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. This testimony is submitted from an Independent Living philosophy and cross-disability perspective that centers the rights, autonomy, and community integration of people with disabilities. AILH is a statewide Center for Independent Living that provides advocacy, peer support, independent living skills training, information and referral, and transition services to people with all types of disabilities across Hawaii. Our work recognizes that people with disabilities are the experts in their own lives and that barriers to full participation exist not within individuals, but within systems, policies, and attitudes that fail to ensure equitable access.

AILH previously submitted testimony to the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Human Services on March 25, 2026, strongly supporting HB1894 HD1. We continue to strongly support this measure and offer this testimony to reaffirm our support for the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act and to address changes made in HB1894 HD1 SD1 now before the Committee on Ways and Means.

**Braille Literacy as a Foundation for Independent Living**



[www.AlohaILHawaii.org](http://www.AlohaILHawaii.org)

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Braille literacy is not simply an educational accommodation—it is a fundamental tool for independence, self-determination, and full community participation for individuals who are blind or have low vision. From an Independent Living perspective, literacy is the foundation upon which people with disabilities exercise choice, control their own lives, and participate equally in education, employment, and civic engagement.

Research shows that individuals who are primary braille readers since childhood report greater life satisfaction, self-esteem, and job satisfaction than individuals who did not use braille as their primary reading medium during childhood. Findings support the premise that braille literacy is key to life satisfaction and self-esteem in addition to academic and job success and that those who are braille literate are more likely to gain high-quality employment. These outcomes—self-determination, economic opportunity, and community integration—are core goals of the Independent Living philosophy and are essential for people with disabilities in Hawaii.

## Hawaii-Specific Need and Systems Barriers

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, more than twenty-four thousand people statewide report low vision or blindness. Currently, one hundred seventy students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are registered with the American Printing House for the Blind to receive special education materials, yet only about ten percent of those registered have braille services in their special education programs. This represents a significant gap in educational equity and a systems-level barrier that prevents students from accessing the literacy tools they need.

From a cross-disability perspective, these barriers—insufficient assessment, delayed access to appropriate materials and assistive technology, and failure to meaningfully involve students and families in planning—are familiar across disability categories. HB1894 establishes a model that advances equity for blind and low-vision students while also demonstrating best practices that should be standard for all students with disabilities: comprehensive and validated assessment, timely access to instructional materials, informed family participation, and accountability in implementation.



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## Positive Changes in HB1894 HD1 SD1

AILH appreciates that HB1894 HD1 SD1 retains the core purpose and findings of the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act and strengthens the implementation framework through a dedicated “Braille Services” part in chapter 302A, Hawaii Revised Statutes. We support the following elements of the SD1:

- Establishing a clear state policy to promote braille literacy and support braille educational services needed for eligible low-vision or blind students to fully participate in school and prepare for life beyond the classroom.
- Defining “braille educational services” to include assessment using tools validated for low-vision or blind students, braille instruction, and the provision of braille instructional materials.
- Requiring that each eligible low-vision or blind student’s Section 504 plan or individualized education program (IEP) consider validated assessment results and provide an opportunity to receive braille educational services.
- Requiring that braille instructional materials or appropriate substitute braille materials be provided concurrently with print instructional materials for other students, so students are not left behind due to format-related delays.
- Clarifying that if a Section 504 or IEP team determines that braille instruction or braille materials are not appropriate, this decision must be supported by thorough documentation of visual functioning, reading and writing assessment, current and future braille needs, accommodations, and a timeline for reassessment.
- Requiring braille literacy support services, including validated reading media assessment tools, braille materials as needed for 504 plans and IEPs, and authoritative information on the efficacy of



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braille educational services.

- Giving preference, when possible, to braille instructional materials provided by in-state suppliers, which can strengthen local capacity and reduce delays in getting braille into students' hands.
- Requiring the Department of Education to cooperate with the Department of Human Services to maintain a register of the blind, provide comprehensive information about braille literacy services and assistive technology to students and families, and participate in the development of Section 504 plans and IEPs.

These provisions align closely with federal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, while improving state-level clarity, accountability, and support for braille literacy. From an Independent Living perspective, they also reinforce informed choice and meaningful participation by students and families.

## Appropriation and Effective Date — Requests to the Committee on Ways and Means

HB1894 HD1 SD1 includes an appropriation section to fund implementation of the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act for fiscal year 2026-2027, but the dollar amount is left blank. For this measure to achieve its intended outcomes, the Department of Education will need sufficient resources to:

- Acquire and maintain validated assessment tools for low-vision and blind students.
- Produce or procure braille instructional materials—including from in-state suppliers where possible.
- Provide braille instruction and braille literacy support services statewide.



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- Offer professional development for teachers and staff to implement the new braille services framework.

AILH respectfully urges the Committee on Ways and Means to provide robust funding in Section 4 that is adequate to cover these implementation needs and to ensure that braille educational services are not an unfunded mandate. Investment in braille literacy will yield returns in higher educational attainment, employment, and community participation for blind and low-vision students in Hawaii.

We also note that HB1894 HD1 SD1 currently has an effective date of July 31, 2055. Such a delayed effective date would postpone the benefits of this Act for an entire generation of students who are in school now or will enter school in the coming years. AILH respectfully requests that the Committee amend the effective date to allow implementation to begin in the near term so that students who are currently in Hawaii's public schools can benefit from the braille services framework, timely access to materials, and improved assessments envisioned by this Act.

From an Independent Living standpoint, delaying implementation for decades conflicts with the urgent need to remove barriers to literacy, employment, and community participation for blind and low-vision students today. Moving the effective date closer will align the statute with the legislature's findings that braille literacy is essential to education, employment, and life for blind and low-vision individuals.

## Cross-Disability Benefits and Independent Living Philosophy

Although HB1894 focuses on students who are blind or have low vision, the principles it establishes—validated assessment, timely access to accessible instructional materials, informed family participation, and robust data and accountability—are cross-disability best practices. Strengthening braille literacy services will improve educational equity for blind and low-vision students while modeling approaches that can and should be extended to other disability categories.



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By centering braille literacy as a pathway to education, employment, and community life, HB1894 supports the Independent Living goals of self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, and full inclusion. Braille literacy allows students to access written information independently, advocate for their needs, participate in cultural and civic activities, and prepare for meaningful work as adults.

## Conclusion

For these reasons, Aloha Independent Living Hawaii strongly supports HB1894 HD1 SD1, the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. We respectfully urge the Committee on Ways and Means to:

1. Pass HB1894 HD1 SD1;
2. Provide a strong appropriation in Section 4 to fully implement braille educational services statewide; and
3. Amend the effective date so that Hawaii's blind and low-vision students can benefit from this Act as soon as possible.

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

Mahalo,

Roxanne Bolden  
Executive Director

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 12:21:00 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Lila Mower          | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

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**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 12:37:48 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b>  | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>            |
|----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Johnnie-Mae L. Perry | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony<br>Only |

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

1894 HB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 3:38:34 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Marie Kouthoofd     | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Testimony of Marie Kouthoofd  
In Support of H.B. 1894, H.D.1, S.D.1  
Hawaii State Senate  
Committee on Ways and Means

Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Marie Kouthoofd, and I submit this testimony in strong support of H.B. 1894, H.D.1, S.D.1, the Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act.

For blind and low vision students, braille is not an extra. It is literacy.

When students have some usable vision, they are often kept on a visual track for too long. The problem is not only what happens if that vision decreases later. The problem is that many students could be more efficient and more fully literate much earlier if they were given access to dual modalities, using both vision and braille, instead of being pushed to rely on vision alone.

That approach can reduce strain, support stronger reading and writing skills, and give students more flexibility as their needs change over time. When braille is delayed, students lose time that should have been spent building literacy.

Students who get braille early are better positioned for independence, higher education, employment, and stronger long-term outcomes. Students who do not often spend years trying to make up ground that should not have been lost in the first place. Literacy outcomes follow people throughout their lives, including into adulthood and the workforce.

This bill helps create a stronger structure by requiring braille to be properly considered, requiring documentation when it is found not to be appropriate, and helping ensure timely access to braille instructional materials. That supports more consistent decision-making and helps prevent delays that can have long-term consequences.

From a fiscal perspective, delayed literacy carries a cost. When students do not get the tools they need early, those effects often show up later in increased support needs, reduced independence, and fewer opportunities. Early access is a more responsible approach.

I respectfully ask the Committee on Ways and Means to pass H.B. 1894, H.D.1, S.D.1.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully,

Marie Kouthoofd

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/6/2026 7:50:38 PM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Ann Lemke           | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Hello Ways and Means chair and committee members,

My name is Ann Lemke and I strongly support the position submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i regarding the 'Braille literacy' bill.

I am a retired professional and I quite simply could not have completed higher education and then worked for 45 years in student services in higher education if I were not proficient in reading and writing Braille. Although I am retired, I use Braille every day and I am writing these comments with a small Braille bluetooth device.

Although I have been totally blind since the age of 18 and I could read printed material as a child. As with so many other people with partial vision, I lost the vision I had. Please ensure that our blind and visually-impaired children and youth continue to have the opportunity to choose to learn Braille; this further requires that we maintain staff within the Department of Education to teach these and other essential blindness-related skills.

Respectfully,

Ann Lemke, Ph.D., retired

University of Hawai'i, Windward Community College

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/7/2026 1:38:07 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

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

Comments:

Testimony from Tabatha Mitchell, mother of 3 graduates of Kalaheo High School that are all currently in colleges all across the United States. One is at UH Hilo on Big Island, one in the state of Kentucky, and the third is in the state of Washington.

I am Tabatha Mitchell of Kaneohe, Hawai'i, and I fully and completely support the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 H.D. 1. S.D. 1 .

HB1894 establishes a clear and responsible state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible low vision and blind students. It recognizes that literacy is foundational to academic success, meaningful employment, and independent living. Research findings show that individuals who are primary braille readers from childhood report greater life satisfaction, self-esteem, and job success. By ensuring that braille instruction and materials are meaningfully considered in Section 504 plans and individualized education programs, this legislation affirms that tactile literacy remains an essential pathway to full participation in society.

My three Kalaheo graduates where in school simultaneously. They were raised together in the same household. Same chores, same schools, same school events, same sibling rivalries. Same subjects and teachers throughout their schooling. Yet, the one that is blind had numerous obstacles and straight-up barriers that the two sighted children did not experience. They started in pre-school because teachers or administrators did not know how to interact with her or how to actively include her in instruction or play.

Although more than twenty-four thousand people statewide report low vision or blindness, and over one hundred seventy students are registered to receive specialized educational materials, only a small percentage currently receive braille services. That disparity signals the need for a consistent, proactive framework. HB1894 H.D. 1 SD1 requires the Department of Education to assess each eligible student's reading and writing needs using validated tools and to base instructional decisions on documented evidence. This safeguards against assumptions and ensures that students are not denied braille access due to oversight or resource limitations.

It is crucial that Hawai'i identify and regularly asses keiki with vision loss. Vision changes. Parents struggle. They do not know Braille. Braille is not vogue or perceived as fun in the same manner that sign language is often perceived within our communities. Yet Braille is ubiquitous

in our environments. Braille is thought of as "too difficult" or "hard to learn." Therefore, it's very very easy to get overlooked or avoided as an instructional medium. I know this reality because I have lived it. This reality is not exposed or talked about enough.

This bill strengthens accountability and timeliness. It requires that when braille instructional materials are included in a student's plan, those materials must be provided concurrently with print materials distributed to other students. This provision prevents delays that place blind and low vision students behind their peers at the time of instruction. The inclusion of clear documentation standards when braille is deemed inappropriate ensures that such determinations are thoughtful, evidence-based, and periodically revisited in light of the student's evolving needs.

Finally, HB1894 H.D. 1 SD1 establishes braille literacy support services as a sustained commitment rather than an incidental accommodation. By mandating validated assessment tools, access to braille instructional materials, authoritative information on effective services, interagency cooperation to maintain the register of the blind, and meaningful participation in the development of education plans, the bill aligns state practice with longstanding principles of equal educational opportunity. Enacting this measure affirms the State's responsibility to prepare blind and low vision students not merely to advance through school, but to lead productive and independent lives.

My blind student is competitive and capable in all ways when provided materials in her language of touch. She has been trained on non-visual skills since the age of three when we received her genetic diagnosis. She started Braille instruction at the age of three, as soon as we knew she was blind. And even though it was a huge uphill battle to secure her materials in Braille and tactile format, the impact of that ongoing fight is wildly evident when she is in groups of blind young adults. She is literate. She is independent. She graduated with the same advanced diplomas and high honors as her siblings and peers. She was not pushed down to a generic low bar diploma. She can be competitive in the classroom and successful in society because she knows Braille. She was taught Braille at the same time and in the same places that her peers were taught to read and write. She simply learned to read & write with Braille, her language of touch. It is crucial that we find kids with vision loss and varying degrees of blindness, and secure Braille instruction from people that are certified to teach Braille. There should be no exceptions, and no excuses. My graduate of Kalaheo High School that happens to be blind is the one that goes to college in the state of Washington. She navigates her campus independently, and functions within her classes just like her peers pursuing their Biochemistry degree.

She lives in a dorm and eats in the cafeteria with her new friends at college. She's advocating to receive her materials in Braille and in tactile format when that is what she needs to learn. She's able to lead this age-appropriate independent life because she is a Braille reader. Period. Audio books, and audible tools are helpful, but they do NOT equal literacy. Blind kids are going to get lost in the sea of perceived technology opportunity as people lose sight of the tried and true relevance of Braille, and hands-on tactile instructional material.

Blind kids must have Braille instruction in place of print. Period. I am of the opinion that it shouldn't even be a discussion. Vision hardly ever gets better; it most frequently gets worse. We must do better. This bill gives us the precise opportunity to save countless blind children from growing up without Braille instruction, which often leads to a life of isolation with a much lower quality of life.

Stop the direct path to social security disability. Help create blind citizens that can have jobs with a competitive wage.

Please pass HB1894 H.D. 1 SD1 so this very important bill can change the outcomes for our blind keiki in Hawai'i.

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/7/2026 9:34:43 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 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 submitted by Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

March 3, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 H.D. 1. I am a blind Hawaii resident attending college on the mainland.

You're probably going to read a lot of statistics in support of this bill. As a STEM major, I do love statistics, But I'd rather just tell you about my life. Let's pretend it's Monday.

8:00 AM; General Chemistry 2: Most lectures are conceptual, so I take notes mostly by typing on my laptop in print. But, I must do my weekly problem sets in braille. I couldn't keep track of anything in my head otherwise.

9:00 AM; Elementary Latin 2: I will use my refreshable braille display, an electronic device that allows me to read the contents of my computer screen in braille, for nearly 100% of the time spent in this class. We'll probably spend the first portion going over some grammar; I'll take notes with the print keyboard but with my braille display connected so I can take part in verbal drills. Eventually, we'll move on to the homework. We all read it out as a class together, which is impossible to do without reading it—listening won't cut it. When it's my turn, I'll read out the English translation if I have it, or translate on the spot. Blind students need braille for second language classes with almost no exceptions.

10:00 AM; free period: I'll work on some homework, or read for pleasure, in braille. Listening is not nearly as enjoyable for me.

11:00 AM; Calculus 2: For the entirety of this lecture, I have my braille display connected to my computer and am taking notes in braille. Specifically, I am using Nemeth code, which is the ideal code for use in math, the sciences, and other technical fields. I cannot do any math past 3rd grade times tables without braille.

12:00 PM: lunch

1:00 PM; intermediate applied cello: At a minimum, I am assigned two pieces to play at the end of the semester at my jury performance. While I don't use braille during my cello lesson, I must have my music in braille so I can memorize my pieces outside of class. I was robbed of the opportunity to learn music notation as a young student in Virginia, so now I must catch up with self-study of braille music; everyone else learned sheet music notation in elementary school. Learning by ear is not sufficient for college level performance. This catch-up work turns something that should be enjoyable and beautiful, playing my favorite instrument, into a chore. I will not stand and watch one more blind student fight to keep loving music because no one knew how to teach them what everyone else got to learn.

6:30 PM; cello studio: This is when I play with all the other cellists to make amazing music.

If it was Tuesday, I'd have chemistry lab. I take much of my data on the computer, but if my hands have chemicals on them or are wet from washing those chemicals off, I'm not touching my laptop. Instead, I take down data on my slate and stylus, a low-tech way to produce hard-copy braille.

If it was Wednesday, I would have an evening class called the Rings of Saturn, which is a two credit course that walks students through a semester long deep reading of a book by the same name. I want to enjoy the process, remember what I read, and be able to read out quotes in class, so I read in braille. I wouldn't be able to meaningfully participate if I was only listening.

If it was Thursday, I would have biology lab. Right now, we're learning about all the taxonomy of plants and fungi, and my screen reader cannot pronounce any of those scientific names. I need my braille display to read these names to have any hope of knowing what's going on.

Long story short, I really don't think I could do any of my classes without braille. If I couldn't read braille, I might not have even tried to go to college at all. If you like being able to read, support this bill. If you like to see all kids have a chance at higher education, support this bill. If you want everyone to have the opportunity to engage in meaningful pursuits and enjoy their lives, support this bill. Thank you for your time.

Testimony submitted by Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Hawaii State Senate

Ways and Means (WAM) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

April 8, 2026, 10:02 am, hearing on HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

Good morning Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and WAM Committee members. My name is Emerie Mitchell-Butler, and I strongly support the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

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Long story short, I really don't think I could do any of my classes without braille. If I couldn't read braille, I might not have even tried to go to college at all. If you like being able to read, support this bill. If you like to see all kids have a chance at higher education, support this bill. If you want everyone to have the opportunity to engage in meaningful pursuits and enjoy their lives, support this bill. Thank you for your time.

Testimony submitted by Katie Keim

Hawaii State Senate

Ways and Means (WAM) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

April 8, 2026, 10:02 am, hearing on HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

Good morning Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and WAM Committee members. I am Katie Keim strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

This bill establishes a clear and responsible state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible low vision and blind students. It recognizes that literacy is foundational to academic success, meaningful employment, and independent living. Research findings show that individuals who are primary braille readers from childhood report greater life satisfaction, self esteem, and job success. By ensuring that braille instruction and materials are meaningfully considered in Section 504 plans and individualized education programs, this legislation affirms that tactile literacy remains an essential pathway to full participation in society.

Although I was print literate until I became blind as an adult, I realized early on in my blindness training that without braille I would struggle, be reliant on sighted help, and not be able to reenter the workforce at the level of professional competence I had prior to becoming blind or was hoping for again. Braille is an essential tool in my success both professionally and personally.

All blind and low vision children have the right to the same quality of education I had growing up as a sighted child. For 20 years as a blind professional, an instructor with blind youth, their parents, and as mentor and advocate for the child's needs in the classroom, I have seen the difference in the success and quality of learning in a low vision or blind child who learns braille compared to those who do not, merely because they are perceived as having enough residual vision to see, Never being given the opportunity to learn braille

which will equalize their learning speed and capacity with their sighted peers. It is a tragedy when the child cannot keep up in class merely because they were perceived “sighted” enough not to need to learn and use braille.

It is a true disability if not given the right tools at the beginning of their educational development. If a child is given braille reading and writing skills later, it can be much harder for them to ever catch up. Every child who is blind or low vision needs to begin their educational journey with all the learning tools at their fingertips.

I have seen students without braille even if they use some residual vision, setting them back, undermining fragile confidences, causing challenges in more than education, creating barriers to making friends your own age, and the differences become too great, isolating the blind child from peer interactions and enjoying the fun of group learning together.

I stand on my testimony and support the position of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii regarding HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

Please pass in favor of HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1. so it may continue through this year’s legislature. Mahalo nui loa for hearing my testimony and considering HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

Testimony submitted by (insert your name here)

Hawaii State Senate  
Ways and Means (WAM) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session  
April 8, 2026, 10:02 am, hearing on HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

Good morning Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and WAM Committee members. I am (insert your name here), strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

I believe very much in the importance of Braille literacy education for low vision and blind students. I have been blind from childhood. I was diagnosed in 1998, and was not taught braille. It would have been very helpful in my case as my eye condition is with my optic nerve. This means that it does not appear to others that I have an eye condition until I try to read something or tell who I am looking at. I could not read the board at school nor the textbooks. Due to this a lot of people didn't believe I needed any accommodations in school, and I had to fight hard to get them. If I had been able to learn braille back then, I was 8 years old in 1998, it would have made getting the information so much less of a struggle.

I had to learn from a young age to advocate for myself, spend extra time after classes with the teachers just to make sure I had the same information the other kids had. I am supporting HB1894 in hopes that another low vision/blind student does not have to struggle the same way I did just to get the information from textbooks, and what was written on the board from the teachers. Yes, there are a lot of things online now, however, the audio versions are not the same with matching up charts and in chapter assignments as they would be in the printed textbooks. The best way to get comparable information would be through the braille version of the books. For these reasons, and many more I support the position of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii regarding HB1894 S.D.1 H.D.1.

Mahalo for considering this bill.

Please pass HB1894. Much mahalo for your consideration.

Testimony submitted by Virgil Stinnett

Hawaii State Senate

Ways and Means (WAM) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

April 8, 2026, 10:02 am, hearing on HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1

Good morning Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and WAM Committee members. I am Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

This bill establishes a clear and responsible state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible low vision and blind students. It recognizes that literacy is foundational to academic success, meaningful employment, and independent living. Research findings show that individuals who are primary braille readers from childhood report greater life satisfaction, self esteem, and job success. By ensuring that braille instruction and materials are meaningfully considered in Section 504 plans and individualized education programs, this legislation affirms that tactile literacy remains an essential pathway to full participation in society.

I believe very much in the importance of Braille literacy education for low vision and blind students. I stand on my testimony in support of the position of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii regarding HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1.

Mahalo for hearing my testimony. Please pass HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1. so this bill can continue moving through the legislature this year.

**HB-1894-SD-1**

Submitted on: 4/7/2026 10:54:47 AM

Testimony for WAM on 4/8/2026 10:02:00 AM

| <b>Submitted By</b> | <b>Organization</b> | <b>Testifier Position</b> | <b>Testify</b>         |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| Emily Cruz          | Individual          | Support                   | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

Aloha Chair Dela Cruz, Vice Chair Moriwaki, and members of the WAM Committee,

My name is Emily Cruz, and I am writing in strong support of HB1894 S.D. 1 H.D. 1, the Hawai'i Braille Literacy Education Act.

I live with low vision due to a genetic condition called Stargardt disease, which often affects individuals at a young age. Because my vision loss began during my school years, I experienced firsthand how important access to proper literacy tools is.

Braille instruction was not meaningfully available to me growing up. As my vision declined, I struggled to keep up in areas where reading and writing were essential. I fell behind, not because I lacked ability, but because I did not have access to the tools I needed.

This bill is important because it ensures that students are given the opportunity to learn in the way that best supports them. It helps ensure timely access to braille instruction and materials so students can keep pace with their peers and build a strong foundation for independence and success.

I respectfully urge you to support and pass this bill.

Mahalo for your time and consideration.