



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

Date: 02/17/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 309 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: EDN

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB1894, 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.

Department's Position:

The Hawaii'i State Department of Education (Department) supports HB1894 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, 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.

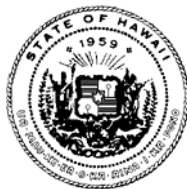
To further promote consistent statewide implementation and equitable access to high-quality braille instruction, the Department respectfully requests consideration of recurring funding to provide full and effective implementation of the program and statewide coordination. While the Department currently 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.

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 LAWE LAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

February 15, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
House Committee on Education

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1894 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.**

Hearing: February 17, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 309 & Via Videoconference, State Capitol

DEPARTMENT'S POSITION: The Department of Human Services (DHS) appreciates the intent of 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 consistently demonstrates that individuals who are braille literate experience stronger 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.



DISABILITY AND COMMUNICATION ACCESS BOARD

Ka 'Oihana Ho'oka'a'ike no ka Po'e Kīnānā

1010 Richards Street, Rm. 118 • Honolulu, Hawai'i 96813
Ph. (808) 586-8121 (V) • Fax (808) 586-8129 • (808) 204-2466 (VP)

February 17, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

House Bill 1894 – Relating to Education

The Disability and Communication Access Board supports House Bill 1894 - Relating to Education. This 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.

Braille literacy is essential for students who are blind or have low vision to learn and post-graduation, obtain and maintain remunerative employment. Some students have vision which diminishes over time, and by the point the Department of Education decides Braille is appropriate the student is about to age out of the public school system. House Bill 1894 ensures that the accommodation desires of the student are given primary consideration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Respectfully submitted,

KRISTINE PAGANO
Acting Executive Director



HAWAI‘I CIVIL RIGHTS COMMISSION

KOMIKINA PONO KĪWILA O HAWAI‘I

830 PUNCHBOWL STREET, ROOM 411, HONOLULU, HI 96813 · PHONE: (808) 586-8636 · FAX: (808) 586-8655 · TDD: (808) 586-8692

DATE: Tuesday, February 17, 2026
TIME: 2:00 p.m.
PLACE: VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE
Conference Room 309
State Capitol
415 South Beretania Street

To:

[COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION](#)

Rep. Justin H. Woodson, Chair

Rep. Trish La Chica, Vice Chair

From: Alphonso Braggs,
and Commissioners of the Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission

Re: HB 1891 Relating to Education

Testimony in SUPPORT

The Hawai‘i Civil Rights Commission (HCRC) carries out the Hawai‘i constitutional mandate that no person shall be discriminated against in the exercise of their civil rights. Art. I, Sec. 5. HCRC enforces laws protecting the people of Hawai‘i from discrimination in the areas of housing, employment, public accommodations, and in state and state-funded services.

The purpose of HB 1891 is to create a Braille literacy resource center and provide proactive Braille services for low vision and blind students attending department of education schools. Promoting literacy and opportunity for low vision and blind students through the provision of Braille educational services will serve to provide equal educational opportunities for students, allowing them and equal opportunity to participate in education and all of the positive benefits of literacy including life-satisfaction and self-esteem. Hawai‘i has long been a refuge of

linguistic diversity and literacy. Higher rates of Braille literacy will serve to increase independence, inclusion, and diversity benefitting our whole community.

HCRC supports HB 1891.

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

House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, strongly supporting HB1894. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for holding this hearing.

HB1894 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.

This is similar to your bill, HB620, which went to conference with the Senate last year. The conference committee worked hard, but time ran out. You're better informed than I am, but it probably came down to couldn't get FIN/WAM clearance. So, main difference between HB620 and HB1894 is this bill doesn't request an appropriation.

The Department of Education (DOE) wants to tell you that they're doing everything this bill requires. That's partly true, but their heart's been in it only partly.

DOE staff told us in 2025 they registered one hundred seventy K-12 students as having low vision or blindness enough to qualify for special education materials paid for by the federal government and provided to states by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), located in Louisville, Kentucky. APH has been providing K-12 school books in Braille Since 1879.

Only about ten percent of students DOE has presently registered with APH 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 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 the legislature 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.

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. 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-1894

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 7:57:20 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

In support.

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:19:38 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Marie Kouthoofd	Individual	Support	In Person

Comments:

Testimony of Marie Kouthoofd

In Support of the Braille Literacy Education Act (HB 1894)

33rd Legislature, Regular Session of 2026

House Committee on Education (EDN)

Chair and members of the Committee,

My name is Marie Kouthoofd, and I am submitting testimony in strong support of HB 1894, the Braille Literacy Education Act.

I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at the age of seven. Because I still had usable vision, I was not taught Braille. I learned to read print visually and was expected to continue that way. As my vision declined, I relied more and more on audio and gradually lost the ability to read print that I had learned earlier. When my visual acuity failed me, I did not have a strong tactile literacy system to fall back on.

Had I been taught Braille early, I could have developed multiple literacy modalities at the same time: visual, tactile, and audio. When one weakened, the others would have remained intact. Instead, I entered adulthood without that backup system. I paid for it then, and I still pay for it now in time, efficiency, and access that should have been there from the beginning.

HB 1894 prioritizes proper assessment. When meaningful assessment does not happen, which occurs far too often, Braille is pushed aside. This bill corrects that failure by making Braille the default when assessment is delayed, incomplete, or insufficient. That safeguard ensures blind students receive Braille instruction and accessible materials at the same time their sighted peers receive print instruction.

This is not about ability. It is about access. Blind children learn when instruction and materials are provided in a form they can fully use. Braille provides direct access to reading, writing, spelling, and structure. Audio alone cannot replace that.

Children in Hawaii do not need to repeat my experience. We can equip them early, strengthen literacy from the start, and support their future and the future of our communities.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1894. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Marie Kouthoofd

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

House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, strongly supporting HB1894. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for holding this hearing.

HB1894 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.

This is similar to your bill, HB620, which went to conference with the Senate last year. The conference committee worked hard, but time ran out. You're better informed than I am, but it probably came down to couldn't get FIN/WAM clearance. So, main difference between HB620 and HB1894 is this bill doesn't request an appropriation.

The Department of Education (DOE) wants to tell you that they're doing everything this bill requires. That's partly true, but their heart's been in it only partly.

DOE staff told us in 2025 they registered one hundred seventy K-12 students as having low vision or blindness enough to qualify for special education materials paid for by the federal government and provided to states by the American Printing House for the Blind (APH), located in Louisville, Kentucky. APH has been providing K-12 school books in Braille Since 1879.

Only about ten percent of students DOE has presently registered with APH 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 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 the legislature 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.

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. 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.

Testimony submitted by me, Eliana Fong, 7th grader at Kaimuki Middle School who loves my education and Braille.

House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am Eliana Fong, a 7th Grader from Kaimuki Middle School strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894.

When I read this bill in Braille to you all with my fingers, I understand that it is trying to make sure blind and low vision students like me have the chance to learn to read and write in Braille. The bill says that reading and writing are very important for doing well in school, getting a great job and becoming independent contributors to society and living on our own, which in my opinion is all very true and necessary. The bill also explains that people who learn Braille when they are young or at the early stages of blindness often feel more confident, able, capable and successful as adults.

The bill also talks about how not many students who could use Braille are actually getting these braille services. That does not seem fair or proactive especially when so many people in our state are blind or have low vision. It says schools should carefully test each student to see what kind of reading and writing works best, instead of making guesses. Please remember most blindness is progressive so it is very important to be prepared by learning braille early, helping those who may be blind or going blind to function on their own as positive and productive member of our State.

I feel I am the lucky one. I was able to obtain these services addressed in this bill at a very early age. Reading is my gateway to learning, entertainment, communication, and my future employment opportunities to support myself and my family of the future.

Please do take a moment to imagine if your child or family member was blind or visually impaired. Would you not want and need these services for your loved one? I am guessing you really would.

To each and every one of you, I thank you for letting me testify today about how Braille is so very important to me and to all those beautiful people out there who are also blind and visually impaired and in need of these services. Braille is truly our gateway to our future.

Members of the house, thank you for listening to my testimony.

Much aloha to you all and thank you for your hard work in the house.

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 3:19:46 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Emerie Mitchell-Butler	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Testimony submitted by Emerie Mitchell-Butler

House of Representatives

Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894. 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 Donald Sakamoto

House of Representatives

Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894.

HB1894, declares a” pro-active Braille literacy approach and policy for our state, which is much needed and long overdue.

This bill has lots of powerful words, saying eligible low vision and blind students matter to the legislature and our students in the Aloha State. Literacy education is fundamental to success in life and recognizes the importance in academic success, and to prepare for meaningful employment, and independent living. When we're blind, our literacy toolbox must include strong braille reading and writing skills. HB1894 truly affirms this understanding.

I urge you all to prepare in having this bill to proceed on for this legislative session not later on. Famous “by failing to prepare, you are preparing to fail” by Benjamin Franklin.

Thank you so much for allowing me to testify on this important bill.

Testimony submitted by Virgil Stinnett

House of Representatives

Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am Virgil Stinnett, President of the NFB of Hawaii, strongly supporting HB1894. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for holding this hearing.

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.

Mahalo for hearing my testimony and for considering this bill.

Testimony of Ann Lemke

House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty third legislature, 2026 regular session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Hello, Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members:

My name is Ann Lemke and I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB1894, the proposed Braille Literacy Education Act. I support the position that has been submitted by the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii.

I am retired from almost 45 years working in higher education, the last 15 years here in Hawaii at the Windward Community College of the University of Hawaii system.

As a blind person, I simply couldn't have pursued this career path without having strong Braille reading and writing skills.

When I was a child, I had partial vision. Like many other young people with some useful vision, I lost my remaining sight as a young adult during my first year of college. If I hadn't previously begun using Braille, I might never have entered and completed college and embarked on a satisfying career. I still use Braille every day—I am writing this statement with a small Braille bluetooth keyboard. Also, I read electronically-produced Braille newspaper articles every day.

Our children who are blind or visually-impaired must continue to have the opportunity to learn to use Braille in all kinds of subject areas from language arts to math and science. Just as important, we must support hiring and supporting qualified teachers and staff and administrators.

I simply can't imagine that the current and emerging generations of blind and partially-sighted children could lose access to learning and using Braille.

Respectfully,

Ann Lemke, Ph.D.

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/13/2026 8:14:52 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Johnnie-Mae L. Perry	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

I, Johnnie-Mae L. Perry, Support

1894 HB RELATING TO EDUCATION.

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/14/2026 7:14:16 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Joel Cho	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee,

As an individual born and raised in Hawaii who has gone through our public school system with low vision and later total blindness as an adult, I strongly support HB1894. I have read the bill and agree with its intent to provide true literacy and a level playing field to all blind and low vision children of Hawaii.

Braille has been around for over 200 years and remains as the most important skill set that a blind person can have. It has also made a seamless transition in its incorporation into ever expanding science and technology. So much so that it is no longer just a simple way to read without sight, but that it greatly amplifies the sense of touch when working with devices to the point that it gives blind students a notable advantage in their ability to complete tasks at a highly advanced level.

Mahalo for giving me the opportunity to testify.

Testimony submitted by Deb Braiman

House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. I am Deb Braiman, proud to support HB1894. I am blind and live in Honolulu.

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. This is definitely my experience. Mahalo for considering HB1894, which I hope you will pass.

Testimony submitted by Katie Keim

House of Representatives

Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

February 17, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894

Good afternoon, Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and members. My name is Katie Keim, a member of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, strongly supporting HB1894. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for holding this hearing.

I believe very much in the importance of Braille literacy education for low vision and blind students.

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 upon reentering the workforce 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 on, 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 finger tips.

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.

Mahalo nui loa for hearing my testimony and considering HB1894.

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/15/2026 9:47:12 PM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
M. Leilani DeMello	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha,

I KĀKO‘O this bill. I am surprised that this is not already something that has been implemented and I hope that this resource will be made available to those who need it.

Mahalo,

M. Leilani DeMello

‘Ōla‘a, Puna, Hawai‘i

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 12:16:45 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Rodney Kouthoofd	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Aloha Chair, Vice Chair, and Committee Members,

My name is Rodney Kouthoofd, and I support HB 1894.

Being involved in the blind community for over 30 years I have seen blind people who were taught Braille early and the efficiency is impressive. The speed, accuracy, and confidence they bring to reading and daily tasks stand out immediately. That level of competence comes from early instruction. It is a shame that this is not afforded to every child because of decisions made early in their education.

My wife is blind, and she would have benefited greatly had she received the right tools early on. Even so, she has excelled tremendously. Still, her path could have been even more efficient and empowering with proper resources—such as access to braille from the start.

HB 1894 prioritizes assessment and prevents delays that deny children a solid literacy foundation. Early access to Braille changes outcomes.

This is about access, timing, and preparation for real life.

I respectfully urge you to support HB 1894.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Rodney Kouthoofd

To: Representative Justin H. Woodson, Chair
Representative Trish La Chica, Vice Chair
Committee on Education

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: February 16, 2026

RE: House Bill 1894
Measure Title: RELATING TO EDUCATION.
Report Title: DOE; Braille Instruction; Braille Instruction Materials; Section 504
Plans; Individualized Education Programs; Braille Literacy Support Services

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1894. Thank you for introducing this bill.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

HB-1894

Submitted on: 2/16/2026 7:54:50 AM

Testimony for EDN on 2/17/2026 2:00:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Maurice Peret	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Testimony from Maurice Peret
House of Representatives
Education (EDN) Committee

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026 Regular Session
February 17, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Hearing on HB1894

Aloha Chair Woodson, Vice Chair La Chica, and Committee Members:

My name is Maurice Peret, and I respectfully submit this testimony in strong support of HB1894, the Hawai‘i Braille Literacy Education Act.

This bill establishes a clear, responsible, and long-overdue statewide policy to promote braille literacy for eligible blind and low-vision students. Persistent misconceptions continue to suggest that braille is slower or less efficient than print. In reality, braille is literacy for blind and low-vision individuals. The rapid expansion of digital technologies has made braille more accessible and affordable than ever through refreshable displays, electronic materials, and modern production tools. Decades of personal experience, professional practice, and peer-reviewed research all point to the same conclusion: students who achieve braille literacy are far better positioned for academic, vocational, and economic success.

My own experience underscores this reality. Throughout my K–12 and postsecondary education, I struggled to rely on print and consistently fell behind my peers. Only after committing to mastering braille in early adulthood did my trajectory change. That decision enabled the independence, professional contribution, and sustained economic participation I have maintained for more than four decades. Presuming braille instruction and materials as an expectation for students’ success under Section 504 Plans and Individualized Education Programs helps ensure that tactile literacy remains a pathway to equal opportunity rather than an afterthought.

State data indicate that more than 24,000 individuals in Hawai‘i are blind or low vision, and over 170 students are registered to receive specialized educational materials. Yet only a small percentage currently receive braille services. This disparity highlights the need for a consistent, proactive framework. HB1894 addresses this by requiring 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 protects students from being denied braille access due to assumptions or resource constraints.

The bill also strengthens accountability and timeliness. When braille materials are included in a student's educational plan, they must be provided concurrently with print materials distributed to peers, preventing delays that create immediate educational disadvantage. Documentation requirements when braille is deemed inappropriate ensure that such determinations are thoughtful, evidence-based, and periodically revisited as student needs evolve.

Finally, HB1894 establishes braille literacy support as a sustained commitment rather than an incidental accommodation. By mandating validated assessments, access to instructional materials, dissemination of authoritative service information, interagency cooperation to maintain the register of the blind, and meaningful participation in educational planning, the bill aligns state practice with the principles of equal educational opportunity. Enacting this measure affirms Hawai'i's responsibility to prepare blind and low-vision students not merely to progress through school, but to lead productive, independent lives and contribute fully to the community and economy.

I urge you to pass HB1894. Mahalo for your consideration.