



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

Date: 03/25/2026

Time: 01:10 PM

Location: CR 225 & Videoconference

Committee: EDU/HHS

Department: Education

Person Testifying: Keith T. Hayashi, Superintendent of Education

Title of Bill: HB1894, HD1, 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 7/1/3000. (HD1)

Department's Position:

The Hawai'i Department of Education (Department) supports HB1894, HD 1, 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.

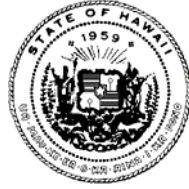
To further promote consistent statewide implementation and equitable access to high-quality braille instruction, the Department respectfully requests consideration of recurring funding to provide full and effective implementation of the program and statewide coordination. While the Department currently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

JOSH GREEN, M.D.
GOVERNOR
KE KIA'ĀINA



RYAN I. YAMANE
DIRECTOR
KA LUNA HO'ŌKELE

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'ŌKELE

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'ŌKELE

March 24, 2026

TO: The Honorable Senator Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senate Committee on Education

The Honorable Senator Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health & Human Services

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

SUBJECT: **HB 1894 HD1 – RELATING TO EDUCATION.**

Hearing: March 25, 2026, 1:10 p.m.
Conference Room 225 & Via Videoconference, 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.



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)

March 25, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE SENATE COMMITTEES ON EDUCATION AND ON HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

House Bill 1894 House Draft 1 – Relating to Education

The Disability and Communication Access Board supports House Bill 1894 House Draft 1 - 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. It appropriates funds and is effective 7/1/3000.

Braille literacy is essential for students who are blind or have low vision to learn and post-graduation, obtain and maintain employment. Some students may have vision which diminishes over time, and by the time the Department of Education (DOE) decides braille is appropriate, the student missed the opportunity to receive braille instruction and literacy support services. House Bill 1894 House Draft 1 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

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

Hawaii State Senate joint committee hearing
Education (EDU) Committee, and
Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. I am James Gashel, National Federation of the Blind (NFB) of Hawaii legislative chair, strongly supporting HB1894 H.D. 1. This is the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Mahalo for holding this hearing.

HB1894 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 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 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 for your consideration.



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Mar 25, 2026

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The Honorable Donna Mercado Kim, Chair
Senate Committee on Education
The Honorable Joy A. San Buenaventura, Chair
Senate Committee on Health and Human Services
The Thirty-Third Legislature
State Capitol
State of Hawaii
Honolulu, Hawaii 96813

SUBJECT: HB1894 HD1 — Relating to Education

Chair and Members of the Committee:

Aloha Independent Living Hawaii (AILH) **strongly supports HB1894 HD1**, 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 (CIL) 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 is grounded in the Independent Living philosophy, which 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.

The Critical Link Between Braille Literacy and Independent Living

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.



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The connection between braille literacy and employment is particularly striking. National research demonstrates that 90% of employed individuals who are blind can read and write braille[1]. Conversely, individuals who are blind or have low vision face an unemployment rate of approximately 74%, with only 44% of working-age people who are blind or visually impaired currently employed, compared to 79% of people without disabilities[2][3]. Among those who are braille literate, employment rates are substantially higher—individuals who are totally blind and employed have odds almost four times higher of having proficient braille skills than those who are unemployed[4].

These statistics reveal a clear pathway: braille literacy creates access to education, which creates access to employment, which creates economic self-sufficiency and community integration—core outcomes of the Independent Living philosophy.

Cross-Disability Implications and Systems Barriers

While HB1894 HD1 specifically addresses braille literacy for students who are blind or have low vision, this bill reflects principles that benefit all students with disabilities. The bill's requirement for comprehensive assessment, individualized planning through IEPs and Section 504 plans, timely access to instructional materials, and informed family participation establishes a model of educational equity that should be standard across all disability categories.

Hawaii currently enrolls over 18,000 students in special education[5]. According to the bill, 170 students in kindergarten through twelfth grade are registered with the American Printing House for the Blind to receive special education materials, yet only approximately 10% of those registered have braille services in their special education programs[6]. 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, this gap is not unique to students who are blind or have low vision. Students across disability categories frequently encounter similar barriers: inadequate assessments, delayed access to



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appropriate materials and assistive technology, insufficient educator training, and failure to center student and family voices in educational planning. HB1894 HD1 addresses these systemic issues directly by:

- Requiring validated assessment tools specifically designed for students who are blind or have low vision
- Mandating that braille instructional materials be provided concurrently with print materials for other students
- Ensuring that families receive comprehensive information about literacy services and assistive technology options
- Requiring meaningful participation of families and students in IEP and Section 504 plan development

These provisions align with both federal requirements under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which mandate that students with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and equal access to educational opportunities[7][8]. The bill strengthens Hawaii's compliance with these federal protections while establishing best practices that could benefit students with all types of disabilities.

Impact of Quality of Life and Self-Determination

Research demonstrates that braille literacy impacts far more than academic achievement—it fundamentally affects quality of life, self-esteem, and self-determination. A 2018 study published in the Journal of Blindness Innovation and Research found that individuals who were primary braille readers since childhood reported significantly greater life satisfaction, self-esteem, and job satisfaction than individuals who did not use braille as their primary reading medium during childhood[9]. Even individuals who learned braille later in life reported higher life satisfaction, self-esteem, and employment rates than those who never learned braille[9].

From an Independent Living perspective, these outcomes reflect the core principles of choice, control, and community participation. When students who are blind or have low vision receive appropriate braille instruction, they gain:



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- **Autonomy:** The ability to independently access written information without relying on others to read aloud
- **Equal opportunity:** Access to the same educational content as their sighted-peers, at the same time
- **Self-advocacy skills:** Experience articulating their own learning needs and preferences
- **Preparation for employment:** Literacy skills that 66% of employed legally blind individuals use on the job[10]
- **Community integration:** The ability to participate fully in cultural, recreational, and civic activities that involve reading

These are not abstract benefits—they are the building blocks of independent living and full participation in Hawaii's communities.

Hawaii-Specific Context and Federal Funding Implications

Hawaii's Department of Education receives approximately \$50 million annually from the federal government to educate students with disabilities[7]. Access to this funding requires compliance with federal laws, including IDEA and Section 504, which mandate appropriate services for students with disabilities. HB1894 HD1 strengthens Hawaii's compliance infrastructure by establishing clear policies, procedures, and accountability mechanisms for serving students who are blind or have low vision.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that more than 24,000 people statewide have low vision or blindness[6]. This represents a significant population that deserves equitable access to education, and whose success in school will determine their ability to contribute to Hawaii's workforce and communities in the future.

Hawaii's current gap—with only 10% of registered students receiving braille services—represents both an educational inequity and a lost investment. Students who do not receive appropriate literacy instruction are more likely to experience academic failure, unemployment, and dependence on public support systems. Research indicates that 60% of students with blindness drop out of school, and the unemployment rate of adults who are blind



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hovers around 70% [1]. The lost productivity due to blindness and eye diseases is estimated at \$8.0 billion per year nationally[11].

Conversely, investing in braille literacy creates measurable returns: higher employment rates, greater economic self-sufficiency, reduced reliance on public benefits, and increased community participation. From an Independent Living perspective, this investment also honors the dignity, autonomy, and potential of every student.

Policy Recommendations Aligned with Independent Living Philosophy

HB1894 HD1 embodies key Independent Living principles by:

1. **Centering student and family voices:** Requiring comprehensive information sharing and meaningful participation in educational planning ensures that students and families are active decision-makers, not passive recipients of services
2. **Removing systems barriers:** Mandating validated assessments, timely access to materials, and trained personnel addresses structural barriers that currently prevent equitable education
3. **Promoting community integration:** By establishing braille literacy as a pathway to employment and community participation, the bill supports the ultimate goal of Independent Living—full inclusion in all aspects of community life
4. **Ensuring accountability:** Requiring the Department of Education to cooperate with the Department of Human Services in maintaining the register of the blind creates data infrastructure for monitoring outcomes and ensuring services reach those who need them

AILH respectfully recommends that the communities consider the following as this bill moves forward:



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- Ensure adequate appropriations to support implementation, including funding for validated assessment tools, braille instructional materials from in-state suppliers when possible, educator training, and assistive technology
- Establish mechanisms for ongoing consultation with individuals who are blind or have low vision, their families, and disability advocacy organizations to monitor implementation and identify areas for improvement
- Consider how the principles established in this bill—comprehensive assessment, timely material access, family engagement, and educator training—could be extended to benefit students with other disabilities
- Ensure that implementation includes professional development for educators statewide, not just specialists, to build capacity and awareness of braille literacy needs

Conclusion

HB1894 HD1 represents a critical step toward educational equity for students who are blind or have low vision in Hawaii. By establishing clear requirements for braille literacy services, this bill removes barriers to independence, employment, and community participation—outcomes that align directly with the Independent Living philosophy and cross-disability advocacy.

Braille literacy is not optional. It is a civil right, protected under federal law. It is an educational necessity, supported by decades of research. And it is a pathway to the self-determination, economic opportunity, and community integration that all people with disabilities deserve.

AILH strongly supports HB1894 HD1 and urges the Senate Committees on Education and Health and Human Services to pass this measure. Mahalo for the opportunity to provide testimony.



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Mahalo,

Roxanne Bolden
Executive Director

References

- [1] BrailleWorks. (2022, January 12). Why is Braille literacy so critical? <https://brailleworks.com/braille-literacy-vital-academic-improvement-employment/>
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- [3] American Foundation for the Blind. (2024). Employment statistics for people who are blind or visually impaired. <https://afb.org/research-and-initiatives/statistics/employment-bvi>
- [4] National Center for Biotechnology Information. (1996). Factors associated with proficient braille skills. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC12188996/>
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- [6] Hawaii State Legislature. (2026). HB1894 HD1 — Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act. Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026.
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Testimony submitted by Donald Sakamoto
Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing
Education (EDU) Committee, and
Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee
Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. I am Donald Sakamoto, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 H.D. 1.

HB1894 H.D. 1, declares a” pro-active Braille literacy approach and policy for our state, which is truly much needed and long overdue.

This bill has lots of powerful words, saying blind people, and particularly blind keiki matter to the legislature and our people in the Aloha State. Literacy education is fundamental to success in life. When we're blind, our literacy toolbox must include strong braille reading and writing skills. HB1894 H.D. 1 truly affirms this understanding.

Many years ago, a blind friend of mine named Terrence Tom learned how to read braille at a young age and became a successful attorney and served on the Hawaii House of representative 48 District for some many years.

We truly need to prepare in having this bill to proceed on for this legislative session to allow our blind students to have the same opportunities that Terrence Tom experienced. 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.

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 1:03:25 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Erie Mitchell	Individual	Support	Remotely Via Zoom

Comments:

Hi I am the older brother of someone blind. Growing up and helping raise her to the incredibly intelligent individual she is today wouldn't have been possible without having easy access to braille resources. Being able to have the same materials as her peers was important both educationally as it allowed her to be able to participate in class discussions, but socially as well because it allowed her to be able to ask her peers for help or provide her peers with their work. Braille is also important because it helps her navigate the world independently. From finding bus stops to get to her hotel and use the elevator and find her room to get some rest to being able to order independently at [Zippy's]. To conclude Braille literacy is as important for blind students as learning to read print is for literally anyone.

Testimony submitted by Virgil Stinnett

Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing

Education (EDU) Committee, and

Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon, Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. my name is Virgil Stinnett, President of the National Federation of the Blind of Hawai'i, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 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.

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 H.D. 1.

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

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/22/2026 7:25:21 PM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony submitted by Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing

Education (EDU) Committee, and

Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. I am Emerie Mitchell-Butler; I strongly support 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.

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 10:26:58 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

Submitted By	Organization	Testifier Position	Testify
Kaili Kameoka	Individual	Support	Written Testimony Only

Comments:

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. I am Kaili Kameoka, and I am strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 H.D. 1.

I speak from personal experience. I am legally blind, and I went through Hawaii's public school system without ever being taught Braille. Instead, I was expected to manage with large print. Throughout K–12, I struggled to keep up with reading demands that my sighted peers handled with ease. Extra time was occasionally available as an accommodation, but that support disappears in college and entirely in the workforce. By the end of my undergraduate studies, completing all required reading had become impossible. Despite those obstacles, I persevered and earned a Bachelor of Applied Science in Creative Media from the University of Hawaii West O'ahu.

Today, friends and colleagues encourage me to pursue a graduate degree. I want to, but I don't see a clear path forward until I can teach myself Braille as an adult, a skill I should have been given as a child. The burden of learning Braille on my own, while managing professional responsibilities, is one that early intervention could have prevented entirely. The impact of this gap wasn't mine alone to carry. My parents watched me struggle through every grade level, knowing something more could have been done. Early Braille instruction would have changed the trajectory of my education, relieved tremendous stress on my family, and opened doors that remain unnecessarily closed to me today.

My experience is not unique. 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. HB1894 H.D. 1 directly addresses this disparity. By requiring the Department of Education to assess each eligible student's reading and writing needs using validated tools, the bill safeguards against the kind of assumptions and oversights that shaped my own education. It ensures that students are not denied Braille access due to resource limitations or systemic inertia.

I now run a company called Adaptive Learning for the Blind LLC, where my mission is to create accessible education and career pathways for blind and low vision individuals seeking careers in technology and creative media. I do this work precisely because I lived the gap this bill is designed to close. Research confirms what I experienced firsthand: individuals who are primary Braille readers from childhood report greater life satisfaction, self-esteem, and job success. This

bill is not just about reading — it is about independence, opportunity, and the ability to lead a full and productive life.

No child in Hawaii should have to navigate their education, their career, or their ambitions around a skill they were never given the opportunity to learn. Please pass HB1894 H.D. 1 so the next generation of blind and low vision students does not face the same barriers I did. Much mahalo for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Kaili Kameoka

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 10:44:00 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony of Marie Kouthoofd in Support of HB 1894 H.D.1

Hawaii State Senate

Joint Committee on Education (EDU) and Health and Human Services (HHS)

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026 Regular Session

March 25, 2026, 1:10 p.m

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members of the Committees,

My name is Marie Kouthoofd, and I am in strong support of HB 1894 H.D.1.

This bill addresses a preventable breakdown in how literacy is delivered to blind students, with long-term consequences that extend far beyond the classroom.

I was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa at age seven. Because I had usable vision, Braille was not introduced. As my vision declined, I lost reliable access to print and was not given a tactile reading system during the years when those pathways are most effectively developed. I had to build those skills later in life.

Today, I read Braille slowly and with effort. It is not automatic. Tasks that should be efficient require sustained concentration, and that difference shows in real time. It affects how quickly I process information, how I write, and how I keep up in academic and professional settings. This was not a matter of ability. It was the result of delayed access to the appropriate reading system.

Nothing can change how that played out for me. What can be changed is what happens to students today.

We would never accept a system where sighted children are not taught to read and are expected to rely on others or audio instead. That would be considered educational neglect. The same outcome occurs when Braille is delayed or denied based on remaining vision.

Forcing students to rely on limited, nonfunctional vision is slow, exhausting, and inefficient. It affects speed, comprehension, and real-time performance, and it limits full participation.

Assessment and instructional decisions often prioritize how much vision a child has in the moment rather than what will sustain literacy over time. As long as some vision is present, Braille is postponed. By the time it is introduced, the opportunity to build fluent, automatic reading has narrowed.

The result is a preventable disparity in literacy.

Literacy determines whether a student can access curriculum, complete written work, and move into higher education and employment. Public education carries an obligation to provide that access equally. Blind students should not be held to a different standard.

HB 1894 H.D.1 addresses this by requiring early and appropriate assessment and ensuring that Braille is considered and provided before literacy gaps are created.

This is about access to a reading system that produces literacy, equity in giving blind students the same starting foundation as their sighted peers, and accountability within educational systems to ensure that access is provided early and consistently.

I respectfully urge your support.

Mahalo,

Marie Kouthoofd

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 10:54:02 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

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

Comments:

Dear Chair, Vice Chair and Committee members:

My name is Rodney Kouthoofd, and I am writing to express my strong support for the Hawai'i Braille Literacy Education Act (HB1894 HD 1).

My wife is blind, and for the past thirty years, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges she has faced as her blindness progressed. I've seen her struggle with headaches from straining to use her limited vision to read textbooks—both as a student and a professor—and the difficulty she faces simply trying to read labels on food containers.

Over the years, we've come to understand that children's brains are remarkably adaptable. We once believed it was too much for a child to learn multiple languages, but we now know that early exposure actually strengthens their cognitive development. This insight extends to Braille. If we want the best outcomes for our children—both blind and sighted—we must equip them with the tools they need to succeed in an increasingly complex world.

Braille, a tactile system of reading and writing, should be part of every curriculum for blind children or those at risk of blindness. While it may seem daunting, learning basic Braille is not overly difficult, especially when introduced early. In fact, blind children who learn it at a young age are likely to grasp it as quickly as sighted children learn print.

Had my wife had the opportunity to learn Braille early on, her struggles would have been alleviated. But that is a lesson from the past, and now we must look forward. Our children here in Hawai'i—both those who are blind and those who may face blindness in the future—deserve the best possible start in life.

I wholeheartedly support HB1894 HD 1 and encourage you to join in this important effort to enhance educational opportunities for all children, regardless of their vision.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Rodney Kouthoofd

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/23/2026 11:44:45 AM

Testimony for EDU on 3/25/2026 1:10:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing

Education (EDU) Committee, and

Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. 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.

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 were 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 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 assess 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 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 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 persuing 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 so this very important bill can change the outcomes for our blind keiki in Hawai'i.

Testimony submitted by Katie Keim

Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing

Education (EDU) Committee, and

Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chairs Kim and San Buenaventura, Vice Chairs Kidani and McKelvey, and members. My name is Katie Keim, strongly supporting the proposed Hawaii Braille Literacy Education Act, HB1894 H.D. 1.

This bill establishes a clear and responsible state policy to promote braille literacy for eligible low vision and blind students. I strongly believe 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 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 H.D. 1.

Please pass in favor of HB1894 H.D. 1 so it may become law. Mahalo nui loa for hearing my testimony and considering HB1894 H.D. 1.

Testimony submitted by Ann Lemke

Hawaii State Senate, joint committee hearing
Education (EDU) Committee, and
Health and Human Services (HHS) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
March 25, 2026, 1:10 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Hello, Chair, Vice Chair, and committee members:

My name is Ann Lemke and I am submitting this written testimony in support of HB1894 H.D. 1, 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.

LATE