



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

Date: 03/03/2026

Time: 02:00 PM

Location: 308 VIA VIDEOCONFERENCE

Committee: FIN

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.

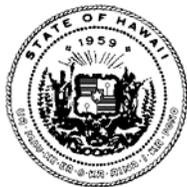
To further promote consistent statewide implementation and equitable access to high-quality braille instruction, the Department respectfully requests consideration of recurring funding to provide full and effective implementation of the program and statewide coordination. While the Department currently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

JOSEPH CAMPOS II
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

STATE OF HAWAII
KA MOKU'ĀINA O HAWAI'I
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES
KA 'OIHANA MĀLAMA LAWELAWE KANAKA
Office of the Director
P. O. Box 339
Honolulu, Hawaii 96809-0339

TRISTA SPEER
DEPUTY DIRECTOR
KA HOPE LUNA HO'OKELE

March 2, 2026

TO: The Honorable Representative Chris Todd, Chair
House Committee on Finance

FROM: Ryan I. Yamane, Director

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

Hearing: March 3, 2026, 2:00 p.m.
Conference Room 308 & 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 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 3, 2026

TESTIMONY TO THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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 remunerative 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



S E A C
Special Education Advisory Council

1010 Richards Street Honolulu, HI 96813

Phone: 586-8126 Fax: 586-8129

email: spin@doh.hawaii.gov

March 3, 2026

**Special Education
Advisory Council**

Ms. Martha Guinan, *Chair*
Ms. Susan Wood, *Vice Chair*

Ms. Dominique Anders
Ms. Kathie Awaya
Ms. Virginia Beringer
Mr. Will Carlson
Ms. Annette Cooper
Mr. Mark Disher
Ms. Nancy Gorman
Dr. Natalie Haggerty
Ms. Stacy Haitzuka
Ms. Mai Hall
Ms. Melissa Johnson
Ms. Tina King
Ms. Dale Matsuura
Ms. Cheryl Matthews
Ms. Jessica McCullum
Ms. Siena Molina
Ms. Trish Moniz
Ms. Cherine Pai
Mr. Chris Pelayo
Ms. Kiele Pennington
Ms. Kau'i Rezentos
Ms. Rosie Rowe
Dr. Scott Shimabukuro
Mr. Herbert Taitingfong
Mr. Steven Vannatta
Ms. Lisa Vegas
Ms. Jasmine Williams

Ms. Helen Kaniho, *liaison to
the Superintendent*
Ms. Wendy Nakasone-Kalani,
*liaison to the military
community*

Amanda Kaahanui, Staff
Susan Rocco, Staff

Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Committee on Finance
Hawaii State Capitol
Honolulu, HI 96813

RE: HB 1894 HD 1 - RELATING TO EDUCATION

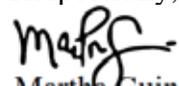
Dear Chair Todd and members of the Committee,

The Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC), Hawaii's State Advisory Panel under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, is in **strong support** of HB 1894, HD 1 which requires the Department of Education to provide the instruction of Braille and the provision of Braille instructional materials to eligible low vision and blind students through their individualized education programs (IEPs) and section 504 plans where appropriate.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that the Department of Education provide instruction in Braille for every student who is blind or visually disabled unless the IEP team determines that instruction in Braille is not appropriate. That determination is based on an evaluation of the student's reading and writing skills, needs, and appropriate reading and writing media, which includes an evaluation of the student's future need for instruction in Braille. This assessment of future needs is important, because many students with congenital eye disease lose vision over time and should be prepared for a lifetime of literacy.

This legislation also promotes family-school partnership and self-determination by providing low vision or blind students and their parents or guardians with comprehensive information about Braille literacy services, assistive technology devices and assistive technology services, including educational programming options. Research has shown that empowering students and their families leads to greater academic and post-school success.

Respectfully,


Martha Guinan
Chair

*Mandated by the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act***

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/27/2026 5:48:27 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

In support.

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

Hawaii State House of Representatives
Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
March 3, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. I am 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 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 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.

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 2/28/2026 3:58:42 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| Robert Burdman | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

I'm a blind individual and braille is very important to learn. Our students need access to braille education. Mahalo

Testimony submitted by Donald Sakamoto

Hawaii State House of Representatives Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session March 3, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. I am 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 much needed and long overdue.

This bill has a lot 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 H. D. 1 truly affirms this understanding.

I urge you all to prepare in having bill HB1894 H.D. 1 to be passed by your committee to continue to proceed on for this legislative session. 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: 3/1/2026 7:11:47 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-------------------|
| Ann Lemke | Individual | Support | Remotely Via Zoom |

Comments:

Aloha, chair, vice chair, and members of the finance committee.

My name is Ann Lemke and I am a retired counselor from the Windward Community College camps of the UniveRsity of Hawaii. I strongly support the position set forward by the National Federation of The Blind of Hawaii.

I could not have successfully earned my doctorate in counseling psychology, earned academic tenure i two different states--Texas and then Hawaii--raised two daughters, and participated in my communities, if I didn't have full Braille literacy.

I had partial vision until my first year of college. I can't imagine how many doors would have been closed to me if I hadn't developed Braille reading and writing skills.

Pleas don't deny our blind or severely vision impaired keiki the opportunity t add Braille t their success toolkit.

Respectfully,

Ann Lemke, Ph.D

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 8:09:21 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Testimony submitted by Emerie Mitchell-Butler

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

12:00 PM: lunch

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

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

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

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

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

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

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 9:30:31 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

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

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-Third Legislature, 2026 Regular Session

March 3, 2026, 2:00 p.m.

Aloha Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and Members of the Finance Committee,

Please accept my testimony in strong support of HB 1894 H.D.1, the Braille Literacy Education Act.

When literacy access comes too late, people take lesser seats. That outcome has nothing to do with intelligence, ability, or effort. It reflects when access was provided and when it was not.

As a blind adult, I have seen what happens when Braille is taught early and taught well. The adults around me who mastered Braille from the start move through the world with authority. They read, write, analyze, and lead. Their competence is unmistakable.

Like many others in the blind community, I did not receive Braille early. I have had to fight to keep up, unable to rely on print and without full command of Braille. I am not speaking about an abstract policy. I am speaking from lived experience.

The bill already outlines the consequences of delayed literacy. Rather than restating what is documented in research, I ask you to consider three examples from adults I encountered this year in our blind community here in Hawaii.

First example:

One adult in our community lost his vision progressively and chose to pursue vocational training. He worked hard. He learned Braille later in life and built moderate proficiency. In class, he performed adequately.

When certification required sustained reading under pressure, everything changed. Audio was slow and exhausting. His late-acquired Braille was not strong enough to support him at speed.

His comprehension was present. His performance under testing conditions collapsed. He did not complete the certification. The job path ended there.

The barrier was literacy timing.

Second example:

Another adult in our community, raised in Hawaii, is articulate, personable, and training in business. He is intelligent and capable. He carries himself with confidence. He cannot read functional print or functional Braille with fluency.

At a recent event, written material was prepared in Braille so it could be accessed independently. The task was straightforward. Under pressure, he could not rely on his own reading. Someone read the Braille aloud to him. He memorized each line before stepping to the microphone. The information was in his hands, yet he could not use it independently.

That dependence was preventable.

Third example is my own:

I have a progressive eye condition. I had visual literacy early, which supported me for a time. When vision declined, that literacy did not transfer. Braille came later.

Today, even as I write this, I sometimes rely on fragments of remaining vision to ensure professional accuracy. It is slow, painful, and exhausting. I continue to build my Braille skills. Transferring modalities without an early foundation is difficult. Neural pathways that support rapid reading are strengthened in childhood. Those pathways were not built for me in Braille. I am building them now, later in life. Progress is possible. Full fluency is harder.

Early literacy builds independence, confidence, and opportunity. Delayed literacy narrows options and increases reliance on others.

These are not isolated anecdotes. They are the long-term outcomes of delayed access. We are what delayed literacy becomes.

For our keiki, that future is still unwritten. HB 1894 H.D.1 ensures assessment and instruction occur early enough to matter. It gives students access before consequences harden into limits.

Please pass HB 1894 H.D.1.

Respectfully submitted,
Marie Kouthoofd

To: Representative Chris Todd, Chair
Representative Jenna Takenouchi, Vice Chair
Committee on Finance

From: Veronica Moore, Individual Citizen

Date: March 1, 2026

RE: House Bill 1894 HD1
Measure Title: RELATING TO EDUCATION.
Report Title: DOE; Braille Instruction; Braille Instruction Materials; Section 504
Plans; Individualized Education Programs; Braille Literacy Support Services;
Appropriation

To All Concerned,

My name is Veronica Moore and I support House Bill 1894 HD1. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Veronica M. Moore

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/1/2026 10:33:14 PM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

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

Comments:

Aloha Chair and Committee,

My name is Joel Cho and I am a life long resident of Hawaii. I was born with an eye condition that limited my eyesight as a child and later caused permanent and total blindness as an adult.

I know first hand what it is like to be told to sit at the front of the class and as close as possible to the chalkboard and yet still struggle to see what is being written on a large board right in front of me. I know what it is like to be laughed at by classmates for being the slowest reader in the room. I also know what it feels like to be separated from your friends and placed in special ed, so as not to distract the other kids or slow down the rest of the class, only to be told that I don't belong there either and to go back to my class and just "try to pay attention!".

Well, I'm not sure if classrooms still have blackboards anymore, but I do know that there are still students in our public school system that are going through the same struggles and frustrations that many of us before them have gone through year after year, decade after decade, with the same sad results over and over again. Many end up failing out of school and are faced with very limited career options after high school. College is doubtful and the military is out of the question.

This vicious and insane cycle can only be stopped if Braille is provided at the forefront of early education for blind and low vision students. With innocent minds and tiny fingers, early childhood is the absolute best time in life to learn the art of Braille. I call it an art because while it is easy to memorize the dots as far as which dots represent letters, words, numbers, etc., it is truly an art to develop the skill of touch to read just as fast and in many cases, faster than a sighted person.

Braille is the equalizer for the blind children of the future who will someday soon have no barriers in the pursuit of their dreams.

Please vote "yes" on HB1894 and give our children Braille.

Mahalo

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 8:53:10 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 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 HD1.

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 HD1 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 HD1.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Rodney Kouthoofd

Testimony submitted by Virgil Stinnett

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

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

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. 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.

Testimony submitted by Katie Keim

Hawaii State House of Representatives

Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session

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

Good afternoon Chair Todd, Vice Chair Takenouchi, and members. My name is Katie Keim, I strongly support 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 continue through this year's legislature. Mahalo nui loa for hearing my testimony and considering HB1894 H.D. 1.

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/2/2026 11:02:30 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 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

Testimony submitted by Jaclyn Leilani Borsa

Hawaii State House of Representatives
Finance (FIN) Committee

Thirty-third legislature, 2026 regular session
March 3, 2026, 2:00 pm, hearing on HB1894 H.D. 1

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

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

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

Mahalo for considering this bill.

Please pass HB1894. Much mahalo for your consideration.

HB-1894-HD-1

Submitted on: 3/3/2026 8:17:07 AM

Testimony for FIN on 3/3/2026 2:00:00 PM

| Submitted By | Organization | Testifier Position | Testify |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| ANNETTE TASHIRO | Individual | Support | Written Testimony Only |

Comments:

As a spouse of a person who is blind, I vouch that Braille needs to be taught while a person is school-age. Even if the person is diagnosed with "low-vision", students do not get access to the full literacy process because they think they can see. The minor nuances of the written language are lost. Many adults who are blind did not get a fully accessible education. They only depend on audio rather than what is printed.