Your Address

**PUBLIC HEARING TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB 646, HD 1**

Monday, March 20, 2017, 1:15 PM

Hawaii State Capitol, Conference Room 225

Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy

Senate Committee on Human Services

To the Senate Committee on Transportation and Energy and Senate Committee on Human Services:

I am a blind person and an active member of the organized blind movement here in Hawaii, and I write to **oppose House Bill 646, House Draft 1**, which would make blind people eligible for handicapped parking passes. I know first-hand that blind people can learn how to walk with a cane, know where they are, and find their way. If a blind person is unable to walk independently due to a lack of training, the handicapped parking pass will have no effect because they will still need someone else’s help. In addition to the fact that it is unnecessary, this bill will reduce the expectations of blind people, which are already low enough as it is. When blind people, especially newly blind adults or blind youths who are coming of age, are offered a handicapped parking pass, we are being told to think of ourselves as more disabled than we actually are. The National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, the oldest organization of blind people in Hawaii, is working to raise the expectations of blind people because low expectations are what create obstacles between blind people and our dreams. Blindness itself is not what holds us back. We want equal rights, so we must be willing to bear equal responsibility.

There is absolutely no reason, and every well-adjusted blind person knows it, that a blind person should ever require a handicapped parking pass on account of blindness. Blindness means that our sense of eyesight does not work, but it means nothing about our legs. If a blind person has an additional disability and requires the handicapped parking pass for that other disability, blindness is not a factor. If someone is just blind, then what that person needs is blindness training, which our state provides to them free of charge. Once blind people have had good training to become an independent traveler, there will be no difference in that person’s traveling ability versus what it would be if that person were sighted. If a blind person lacks the proper training for independent travel, then that person must continue using the same helping mechanisms which got them to the location in the first place to finish the journey. For any situation imaginable, there is a better solution. If any blind people want this handicapped parking pass out of laziness, I will be the first to remind them that we cannot have our cake and eat it, too; if we want equal rights, we must bear equal responsibility.

When blind people, especially newly blind adults or blind youths who are coming of age, are offered a handicapped parking pass, we are being told to think of ourselves as more disabled than we actually are. We are being told that we should not be expected to walk from a car to a building and back if that car is parked in a normal parking space. This is a small and simple message, but it is a part of a societal message that blind people are less capable than our sighted counterparts. **When blind people are held to normal expectations, that empowers us toward doing normal things, getting normal jobs, paying normal taxes, and being normal members of society.**

House Bill 646, House Draft 1, is not only unnecessary; it codifies a system of oppression of blind people. I am urging you to please join me in opposing this bill. If you would like to meet with me, as well as many of my friends and colleagues in the National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii, I am eager to do so. If you want to learn more about the capacity of blind people, you might also consider visiting the office of Ho`opono Services for the Blind, the state agency providing rehabilitation services to blind people in Hawaii, where you can learn about the type of rehabilitation training available to blind people in our state.

Much mahalo for your consideration!

Aloha,

Name

Title

Chapter Name

National Federation of the Blind of Hawaii